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STUDIES IN THE RELIGION
OF ISRAEL

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*Containing the substance of the Donnellan Lectures
preached before the University of Dublin, 1902-3*

STUDIES IN THE
RELIGION OF
ISRAEL. *By the Rev.*

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LONDON: **HODDER AND**
STOUGHTON   27
PATERNOSTER ROW 1904

Printed by Hazell, Watson & Viney, Ltd., London and Aylesbury.

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P822

PREFATORY NOTE

IN the principal theological colleges of Great Britain and America the modern criticism of the Old Testament is being taught to the students. The names of a few well-known teachers will be sufficient to make this evident. The reader will notice that these men are actually engaged in the work of teaching, and that they do not belong to any one Church; or to one school of theology. We have Professors Driver and Cheyne in Oxford; Professors Kirkpatrick and Barnes in Cambridge; Professors A. R. S. Kennedy and J. Patrick in Edinburgh University; Professor W. H. Bennett in New College, London; Professor G. C. Cameron, Free Church College, Aberdeen; (the late) Professor A. B. Davidson, New College, Edinburgh; Professor G. A. Smith, United Free Church College, Glasgow; Professor Nicol, University of Aberdeen; Professor Stevenson, Theological College,

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Bala ; Professor T. Witton Davies, Baptist College, Bangor ; Professor A. C. Whitehouse, Cheshunt College ; Professor T. Skinner, Presbyterian College, London ; Professor C. H. Toy, Harvard University ; Professor G. H. Moore, Andover Seminary ; Professor H. Preserved Smith, Amherst College ; Professor C. H. Briggs, Union Theological Seminary, New York ; Professor Ira M. Price, University of Chicago ; Professors Moulton and Curteis, Yale University ; Professor W. Max Müller, Reformed Episcopal Church Seminary, Philadelphia. To these must be added the honoured name of Dr. H. E. Ryle, formerly Hulsean Professor of Divinity, Cambridge, and now Bishop of Winchester.

This list might be very greatly enlarged, but it is sufficient for my purpose. The point is this : It is impossible that the new learning can be thus generally taught, and yet remain the peculiar possession of scholars and specialists. In fact, it has already ceased to be so. Some time ago one of my Sunday school teachers said to me, "Will you tell me what is the Priests' Code?" I asked her how she had heard of it? She replied that

she had been reading about it in a magazine article.

This being so, it is surely the duty of all teachers to understand the differences between the new and the old criticism. From my standpoint the important point is, not which side a man may take, but that he should know both sides, and be prepared to discuss the difficulties which may be propounded to him impartially, and without heat.

Again, archæology has thrown light upon almost every page of the Old Testament. Those who undertake to teach others should know what the spade of the excavator has effected.

To learn these things requires careful and accurate study. But is the Bible not worthy of it? Whether a man finally accepts the results of modern criticism or not, this study will give him a better acquaintance with the text of Holy Scripture, a more accurate knowledge of the lives and times of those who shared in its composition, and, I believe, a deeper reverence for the revelation contained in its pages. Many persons who say they believe in the Bible have an imperfect

knowledge of its contents. Their own opinions in regard to it are what they really believe in.

Quotations from the Old Testament are generally given in the following pages in the language of the Revised Version. In the case of the prophecies of Isaiah I have frequently used the translation of Professor Cheyne, especially in poetical passages. Similarly, in the writings of the minor prophets I have occasionally availed myself of a rendering by Professor G. A. Smith, when it seemed to me to bring out the meaning more clearly.

I have used the word Yahweh and not Jehovah. I have done so, not so much because the latter is due to a mistake on the part of Petrus Galatinus, a well-known scholar in the sixteenth century, as because to us the connotation of the word Jehovah is that of the Christian's God, and not that of the God of the clan Israel twelve hundred years before Christ.

I have gratefully to acknowledge the kindness of the Rev. E. B. Ryan, M.A., in reading the proofs of this book, and the care which he took in their revision.

As these lectures are intended for the

general reader, and not for the specialist, I have not encumbered my book with a long list of authorities, but I append the names of a few useful works. The lectures had been delivered, and the greater part of them was in the hands of the printers, before I had the pleasure of reading Dr. H. P. Smith's *Old Testament History*.

Hastings.—*Dictionary of the Bible*.

Driver.—*Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*.

„ *Deuteronomy*.

„ *Genesis*.

Bennett and Adeney.—*A Biblical Introduction*.

Haupt.—*The Polychrome Bible*.

Kuenen.—*The Religion of Israel*.

Wellhausen.—*History of Israel*.

Renan.—*History of the People of Israel*.

H. Preserved Smith.—*Old Testament History*.

Stanley.—*History of the Jewish Church*.

Robertson Smith.—*The Prophets of Israel*.

„ „ *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church*.

„ „ *The Religion of the Semites*.

Pinches.—*The Old Testament in the Light of the Historical Records of Assyria and Babylonia*.

Budde.—*Religion of Israel to the Exile*.

Cheyne.—*Jewish Religious Life after the Exile*.

Jevons.—*Introduction to the History of Religion*.

Kirkpatrick.—*The Doctrine of the Prophets*.

„ *The Divine Library*.

- Ryle.—*The Canon of the Old Testament*.
„ *Early Narratives of Genesis*.
Montefiore.—*Hibbert Lectures*.
Maspero.—*The Dawn of Civilisation*.
Hommel.—*Ancient Hebrew Tradition*.
Sayce.—*Hibbert Lectures*.
„ *Gifford Lectures*.
G. A. Smith.—*Isaiah* (2 vols.) and *The Book of the
Twelve Prophets* (2 vols.), Expositor's Bible.
Johns.—*The Oldest Code of Laws in the World*.
Davidson.—*Old Testament Prophecy*.
Charles.—*Eschatology*.
Deane.—*Pseudepigrapha*.

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CHAPTER I

BABYLONIA

AT the present time the thoughts of Christian people are turned to the Old Testament, and there is much unrest. Most of the books which deal with modern higher criticism are largely technical, or treat only of some particular point. The man in the street has not read them, and would not understand them if he did.

The archæologist also is criticising the Old Testament from his standpoint; and sometimes will not see that any other standpoint is possible. The man in the street has heard of this also, and, when he reads that the archæologist is attacking the higher critic, imagines that the archæologist is on the side of the older views. Such an idea is quite opposed to facts.

And while this is going on people are asking,

“What does it all mean? Will any one tell us in a way we can understand what effects criticism and archæology have really had upon men’s views of the Old Testament; tell us how we are to read the Old Testament for the future; or is the Old Testament going to be left to us at all?”

That is what I am going to try to do. I desire to present in outline the growth of religious ideas amongst the Jews, and, avoiding all disputed points of detail, to describe the development of an inspired people. For I believe that in fifty years, when the new learning has been simplified so that ordinary people can read and understand it, they will also understand and cherish their Bible as they have never understood or cherished it before.

Christianity is the daughter of the religion of Israel. The latter also cannot be separated from what went before it. Its roots are buried in a far distant past. To understand its development we must consider its origins. We must first endeavour to outline the leading religious ideas of the ancient Semitic races. This done, we must obtain a closer view of

the faiths of Babylon and Egypt. Babylonia was the home of Abraham. Egypt was the cradle of the nation of Israel.

The region originally occupied by nations of Semitic origin was continuous and compact. Its centre was the Arabian peninsula; its boundaries the Syrian desert, the Mediterranean Sea, Mount Taurus, and the mountain ranges of Armenia and Iran. The natural features of the great territory thus defined tended to break up the Semites into a number of nations or clans, while few alien races were present to modify their usages or religion.

These ancient Semitic communities were generally small, and, like the Scottish clans, were engaged in constant feuds. Each tribe had its own particular deity, who was an enemy to its enemies, and a friend to its friends. Chemosh gave victory to Moab, Asshur to Assyria, and the enemies of Yahweh were simply the enemies of Israel. Even the last of the Hebrew prophets calls a foreign woman "the daughter of a strange god."¹ The god of the nation was considered to be in a very literal sense the father of the

¹ Mal. ii. 11.

nation. The god and the tribe made up a single community.

Further, the deity was thus closely connected not only with the people but also with the land in which they dwelt. Palestine was Yahweh's land, as the Israelites were Yahweh's people. Yahweh could only be worshipped in his own territory. Was an attempt made to drive David from his country?—then he represents his enemies as saying, "Go, serve other gods." Did Naaman resolve to worship no god but Yahweh?—then he must bring away with him two mules' burden of earth, because the god of the land could only be worshipped in his own territory, or upon an altar erected on earth from it. At a later date the Jewish exiles could not sing Yahweh's songs in a strange land.

Again, primitive races ignored the distinction not only between human life and that of the lower animals, but also between organic and inorganic matter. The deity might therefore enter into and become incorporated with an animal, a stone, a tree, or a fountain. There he will always be found by his worshippers. Amongst the Western Semites

especially this relation was expressed by the title Baal. It is necessary to understand this word. It was used of men, and implied ownership—land, houses, or cattle. When applied to the gods, it also meant “owner” and not “sovereign,” the possessor of the land rather than the ruler of its inhabitants. This accounts for the multitude of Baals whom we read of in the Old Testament. Melkarth was the Baal of Tyre; there was a Baal of Lebanon, a Baal of Mount Hermon, another of Mount Peor, and so forth. We can therefore understand how it came about that the Israelites sometimes spoke of Yahweh as Baal. Thus, two of Saul’s sons were Ishbaal, “Baal’s man,” and Meribaal, perhaps “Baal’s warrior,” while in 1 Chron. xii. 5 we have Bealiah, “Yahweh is my Baal,” and we read in the book of Hosea that the Israelites called Yahweh Baali, or “My Baal.”¹

Who then were these Baals? The worship of the sun apparently formed the basis of Semitic religion, and it has been urged that all the Baals should be identified with the sun. This appears to be incorrect. The sun might

¹ Hos. ii. 16,

be a Baal, but sometimes a Baal was distinguished from the sun. The smaller local Baals seem to have been mainly regarded as the givers of fertility to their own districts, and were sometimes looked upon as the authors of the rains of heaven, and at others as the gods of the subterranean springs. On the other hand, the Baal of Babylon, whose name was Merodach, was the supreme sun-god.

At the root of the religion of the Semites was the institution of sacrifice. Every reader of the Old Testament must have been struck by the fact that no account of the origin of sacrifice is given therein. The reason is that it was a primitive element of the Semitic faiths. But this fact does not make it easier to explain. It is clear, however, that the offerings made to Deity were at first chosen from the food-supplies of the people, and a sacrifice was literally the food of the gods. The author of Ps. l. may protest against the idea that Yahweh eats the flesh of bulls, and drinks the blood of goats. The fact that he does so protest shows how prevalent was the idea ; and the language of the priestly ritual remained unaltered, and sacrifices were called "the

food of Deity." In this sense also Jotham speaks of "wine that cheereth gods and men."

In the earliest times the idea underlying sacrifice seems to have been that of communion rather than that of expiation. The god and his worshippers were made one by partaking together of the flesh and blood of the victim. Then, as men's idea of God became less material, we find certain modifications in practice introduced. Animal flesh began to be considered too substantial a meal for Deity. The gods might drink the sacrificial blood or the wine libation, but the flesh of the victim must be burnt in order that they may regale themselves with the odour. Thus in the Hebrew account of the sacrifice offered by Noah after the Flood we are told that "Yahweh smelled the sweet savour"; while in the corresponding passage in the Chaldæan epic we read, "The gods smelled the sweet savour. The gods gathered like flies over the sacrifice."

But every tribe had at times to endure reverses. The only reason could be that their god was offended. Special offerings

then became necessary to appease his anger. Such sacrifices appear at first to have been placatory rather than expiatory. The consciousness of sin on the part of the worshippers was of slow growth. For example, we read in the inscription of Mesha, King of Moab, that Chemosh was wroth with his people, and suffered Israel to oppress Moab; and again, that Chemosh fought for Moab, and delivered it from the hands of the enemy. No reason is given. It would seem that the god just changed his mind. On one occasion when his city was besieged, Mesha offered his own son on the wall of the town, as a burnt offering to appease Chemosh. But as the sense of sin deepened such holocausts became more expiatory in their character. At the same time, it must be remembered that in the regular sacrifices to the sun-god the ceremony was chiefly dramatic. The unfortunate victim simply played the part of the sun-god, overwhelmed by night or dying from the cold of winter.

We must now turn to the special branch of the Semitic race whose religious history is the subject of these lectures,

Abraham, we are told, set out from "Ur of the Chaldees." The city referred to seems to have been situated some two hundred miles south-west of Babylon. We must therefore look to Babylonia for the primitive religious beliefs of the family of Abraham.

At the time when Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees the Semites were the ruling power in the land. But it had not always been so. The Semites there had inherited an earlier and very remarkable civilisation.

In the most remote period Babylonia was divided into two provinces, the northern called Accad, and the southern Sumer, or Shinar. Six thousand years before Christ, Eridu, a town on the shores of the Persian Gulf, was the most important religious centre in Sumer. Its god was Ea, whose dwelling-place was the ocean-stream which surrounded and lay beneath the earth. This ocean-stream is "the deep" upon which we read in Genesis the darkness was, and over which the Spirit of God brooded. The Persian Gulf was the supposed entrance to the ocean-stream. We shall see hereafter that the name Ea is probably to be identified with Yahweh or Yah.

Ea had a wife, Dam-kina, the earth. At the word of Ea the earth had risen from the ocean-stream, and it still rested upon it. We have an echo of this old idea even in New Testament times, when St. Peter speaks of "the earth compacted out of water and amidst water." Overarching the earth was "the Firmament," which was supposed to be a solid case, and pierced with windows. Above it was the ocean-stream of Heaven, "the waters that were above the Firmament," and these again were united to the great deep beneath the earth. Through the windows of the Firmament the rain descended.

Ea was the god of the deep, and so, when his image was taken in procession by his worshippers, it was carried in a small ship. In later time the Semites, not being seafaring peoples, changed the ship of God into what we call an ark, carried upon the shoulders of men. Hence the plan of the ark in the book of Exodus.

Ea and Dam-kina had a son, Tammuz, the primitive sun-god of Eridu, afterwards identified with Merodach of Babylon.

In later days, when Semitic influence was

paramount, and the sun-god was supreme, men identified Ea with Baal or Bel, and more especially with the Baal whose title was Illil, or "the Lord of Ghosts." The Semites borrowed the Sumerian "Lil," which signifies a "ghost" or "spirit," under the form Lîlû, from which a feminine was formed, Lilitu, or Lilith. Centuries afterwards Hebrew rabbis imagined Lilith to have been the first wife of Adam :

It was Lilith, the wife of Adam ;
Not a drop of her blood was human,
But she was made like a soft, sweet woman.

Lilith was the origin of the idea of the vampire, who sucks the blood of its sleeping victims. This belief was common among the Jews in the time of the prophet Isaiah. We read in the description of the desolation of Edom, "The wild beasts of the desert shall meet with the wolves, and the he-goat shall cry to his fellows, and Lilith shall settle there and make her a place of rest."¹ Indeed, in Palestine at the present time, after a child is born, incantations are used for eight days

¹ Isa, xxxiv. 14.

to keep away Lilith, who is supposed to pursue the descendants of Eve, her successful rival, with undying hostility.

Into a world whose religious ideas have been thus briefly described, the Semites came. Apparently for purposes of trade they left their home in Mesopotamia. A masterful people, they gradually got the upper hand of the Accadians and Sumerians among whom they settled, and so thoroughly entered into their life that they finally became one nation. They found in their new country a civilisation and religion ready to their hand. These they adopted, but, being not only masterful but also persistent, they gradually placed their own deities at the head of the Babylonian Pantheon, while they themselves gave a certain recognition to the gods of the people among whom they dwelt.

The whole of the Old Testament is intensely Semitic. Almost all the peoples mentioned in its narratives are of Semitic origin, and have the closest connection with one another. Historians may divide the race into Eastern and Western Semites, but the fact remains that the Egyptians on the extreme west were

apparently more closely related to the Eastern Semites of Babylon than to the Western Arabs and Aramæans. According to Hommel the Egyptians must, in the remotest antiquity, have migrated from Mesopotamia to Egypt.

Wherever the Semites were dominant the sun-god was supreme.

The nature of the changes in the religion of Babylonia, due to these immigrants, is therefore at once evident. The gods of "the deep" and of "the dry land" were no longer paramount. Henceforth the sun-god took precedence. But different towns had their own solar deities, each representing some particular aspect of the great luminary. The greatness of such a deity depended upon the importance of the town of which he was god. So, when Babylon became the greatest city in Asia, its solar deity, Bel-Merodach, became prince of all the gods.

In Babylon the temple of Bel-Merodach was a magnificent building. Its entrance was "the gate of glory," which led to "the Holy of Holies." Nebo was the son of Merodach, and "the Holy of Holies" was his especial shrine. He was the god of prophecy and

of literature. His worship spread over all Asia; and so, far away to the west, Moses died,

By Nebo's lonely mountain,
On this side Jordan's wave.

In later days the term for a prophet in Israel was "nabi," and the root of this word is clearly the same as that of Nebo.

In very ancient times the moon-god was also worshipped in Babylonia. Originally called Nanak, the Semites changed his name to Sin. This title has been found inscribed on a tablet as far west as Arabia, and Mount Sinai, where the Jewish law was promulgated, signifies "the mountain dedicated to Sin." It is especially worthy of note that Abraham's first migration was from Ur to Haran, and in both places the moon-god Sin was the chief deity.

The daughter of Sin, the moon-god, was Istar, the evening star. She was the bride of Tammuz. In a very ancient Semitic hymn we read how Tammuz, the sun-god, was slain by the cold of winter. In order to restore him Istar went down to Hades to obtain the water of life. Afterwards the yearly mourning for

the death of Tammuz became universal. We read of it among the Jews at so late a date as that of the prophet Ezekiel. The vision of Yahweh brought before the mind of the prophet the abominations that were commonly practised, and in the narrative we read, "Then he brought me to the door of Yahweh's house which is towards the north, and there sat the women mourning for Tammuz."

How wonderfully the old worship of the sun-god has clung to the human race! Here am I writing at the beginning of the twentieth century in a most modern and scientific world; and yet, within a mile from where I sit, numbers of poor people still pay their annual homage to the sun, not knowing what they do. For near Downpatrick are two hills, Struell and Slieve-na-Griddle ("the mountain of the Cromlech"). On the top of each is an old stone altar. Near them is a circle of upright pillars, a Gilgal, "the standing stones," as the people say. Between the hills is a valley, through which a little river runs. Before the Christian era, at each recurring summer solstice, the sun-god was supposed to give its waters

¹ Ezek. viii. 14.

healing efficacy. Christianity was introduced, but it could not overcome the old belief, so it tried to Christianise it. The date was afterwards changed to that of the nearest saint's day, which happened to be that of St. John Baptist, June 24th; and still on that day people go to the wells to seek a cure for various ailments, and they do so because there was a time in this country also when all men paid homage to the sun.

CHAPTER II

EGYPT

THERE was a period in the history of Biblical criticism when it was customary to treat Abraham as the mythical founder of the Jewish nation, or even as a tribal deity. Modern research has shown the inaccuracy of such crude criticism. It has thrown back by several thousand years the beginnings of human civilisation. In some cases the great founders of empires may have been deified in later times, but in their day they lived strong and real lives on earth. Take, for example, Menes, the founder of the Egyptian monarchy, who lived perhaps three thousand years before Abraham. In reference to this monarch it is not very long since so distinguished an Egyptologist as Professor Maspero wrote: "Menes owes his existence to a popular attempt at etymology." A few years passed, and the tomb of this king, who was asserted

to be only an etymological myth, was actually found. Similarly in regard to Abraham we know now that he did not live in the dark ages of the world, but in the midst of a great and ancient civilisation; and, when he traversed the six hundred miles from Ur to Haran, he did not travel through the unknown desert, but followed one of the great Asiatic trade-routes which had for centuries been trodden by the feet of men.

For two generations after the death of Abraham his descendants maintained a nomadic existence, wandering from pasture to pasture. Now it is comparatively easy in our day to form a picture of the public worship of the Semites in their great cities. We know what the temples were like; we have descriptions of the religious rites practised; we can read their hymns. It is harder to realise the character of the religious life of Isaac, Jacob, and their families. Yet it must have been of the simplest character, and, in spite of the divine impulse given to Abraham, it cannot have differed much from that of other Semitic clans in like surroundings. Their usual name for God, in common with other Western

Semites, seems to have been El, or El-Shaddai. The derivation of these terms, which are prehistoric, is quite uncertain.

The word Elohim, which is also commonly used for God throughout the Old Testament, has a wider significance. The Semites believed the world to be full of demons or super-human beings, but they make little distinction between these and the ghosts of the dead. Illil, the Lord of Ghosts, was supreme over all. But in Palestine, when, at Saul's request, the witch of Endor called up the spirit of Samuel from the dead, she declared that she saw Elohim rising from the earth in the form of an old man clothed in a mantle. Elohim was thus the general term used by the inhabitant of Palestine to include all the spiritual beings in whom he believed. Its exact meaning in each case can therefore only be decided by the context.

That the beliefs of the descendants of Abraham were very similar to those of their neighbours is shown by the fact that, when Jacob took advantage of Laban's absence to leave Padan-aram, Rachel stole the family gods, or Teraphim. In like manner, when

Æneas escaped from Troy, he carried off the Penates. Jacob also, like any other Semite, set up and consecrated a sacred stone, and called it Bethel, or "the house of God."

While therefore for three generations the clan Israel increased in numbers and wealth, living a nomadic existence, it is to Egypt we have to turn for the birthplace of the nation of Israel. Here the family of simple shepherds were introduced to the splendour of an ancient civilisation. The religion of Egypt at first sight appears absolutely bewildering with its infinity of gods. It is only when we realise that here also the sun-god was supreme, that other deities fall into their proper relation to the great source of animal life. The sun-god himself in one inscription is addressed under seventy-two different names.

While in the religious thought of Egypt there was always a strong pantheistic tendency, yet, speaking generally, its confusions and contradictions can only be explained by the intense conservatism of the people. Nothing ever became antiquated in Egypt. New ideas arose which to us appear absolutely subversive of the old. The Egyptians felt no such

difficulty. The old and the new existed side by side. Perhaps we can see something of the same spirit among the Israelites. The final editor of the book of Genesis saw no objection to placing two dissimilar accounts of the creation at the commencement of the sacred history.

In some Egyptian hymns there are passages expressing very lofty ideas about God, but the whole tendency of religious thought was unspiritual. The consecration of an animal to a deity led to the actual worshipping of the beast. At Memphis the sacred bull was believed to be the actual incarnation of Ptah, the father of the gods; while at On, or Heliopolis, another bull was the embodiment of Rā, the sun-god. The effect of this is perhaps seen in the religion of Israel when Aaron moulded the golden bull, and Jeroboam set up bulls in Bethel and Dan. On the other hand, we have to remember that in the most ancient times the bull was sacred to the god Ea, of Eridu.

At the time of the Israelitish sojourn the Egyptians were in possession of a copious literature. Two kinds of writing were in use,

the hieroglyphic and the hieratic. The former was pictorial, and the number of signs was about two thousand. The latter was a cursive writing, derived from the hieroglyphic, and was much used by the priests. Now Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was therefore acquainted with the art of hieratic writing. Moreover, the Egyptians understood other languages beside their own, and could carry on correspondence in a foreign tongue. Take the famous Tell-el-Amarna tablets. These contain a series of letters which passed between the King of Egypt and his deputy-governors in Canaan a century before the Exodus. They are written in the Babylonian language. Does not this fact throw a wonderful light on the solidarity of the old Semitic world? The language of Abraham, the language spoken at Babylon, and Ur, and Haran, was perfectly familiar to the priestly scribes of Pharaoh. One might almost say that fifteen hundred years before Christ the speech of Abraham was the language of diplomacy.

In estimating the effect which the religious ideas of Egypt had upon the Israelites, we

must remember that during their residence in Egypt they remained a separate community, dwelling in a district specially assigned to them. Here they practised their own religious rites, and probably the complications of Egyptian religion appeared bewildering to a community of simple-minded shepherds. Nevertheless, the education which Moses received made a deep impression upon the national consciousness, and in the first days of Christianity we find Stephen reminding his hearers that Moses "was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians." Taking these facts into consideration, what we gather from the sacred records is exactly what we should have expected. Egyptian religion in its larger aspects had little or no effect upon Israel, but at first it was apparently all-powerful in matters of detail. The arrangements given us of the tabernacle are Egyptian. The weaving of cloth, the dyeing of skins, the cutting of precious stones, the manufacture of "fine linen wrought with needlework," were arts practised in Egypt. The strict rules for priestly purification, the ephod of the High Priest, the pomegranate decoration on the hem of his robe,

his breastplate and his mitre, all had their counterparts among the Egyptians.

But it may be urged that we ought not to build much upon the sojourn of the children of Israel in Egypt, as grave doubts have been thrown upon the fact itself. We must therefore attempt briefly to discuss the question.

About 2200 B.C. what is known as the twelfth dynasty came to an abrupt conclusion. Semite invaders from Asia swept over Northern Egypt, subdued it, and their leader finally ascended the throne. Southern Egypt offered a long and steadfast resistance, and it was in the south finally that the movement originated by which the usurpers were expelled. But the fact remains that for about five hundred years the Hyksos, or Shepherd Kings, sat on the throne of Egypt. It was during the closing period of their domination that the Israelites settled in the land of Goshen. Semites themselves, the Hyksos offered a kindly welcome to Semitic immigrants. At length, about the year 1700 B.C., the native Egyptians succeeded in overcoming the invaders, and Ahmes, with his negress wife Nefertari, ascended the throne as the founder of the eighteenth dynasty.

At first the change of rulers does not appear to have made any alteration in the condition of the Israelites. Left in undisturbed possession of their pasturage in the land of Goshen, in the course of the next two centuries the small band of shepherds had increased into a most powerful community. It is also impossible to doubt that the memory of the Hyksos domination hung like a nightmare over the rulers of Egypt. To prevent the possibility of its recurrence they strongly fortified the Isthmus of Suez. But in their own country was a Semitic race daily increasing in strength and importance. Should a new invasion take place from the east, then the co-operation of the Israelites might be sufficient to turn the tide of battle in favour of the foe. Such apparently were the considerations which guided the policy of Egypt during what is known as "the period of the oppression." The severity of the repressive measures adopted culminated in the time of the powerful king, Rameses II., about 1300 B.C. ; while the Exodus took place during the reign of his successor Merneptah I., about 1250 B.C.

It has, however, been supposed that certain

recent discoveries, notably the Tell-el-Amarna tablets, militate against these conclusions. On them we have certain letters from the King of Jerusalem imploring Pharaoh, as suzerain of the country, to come to his aid against the Ḥabiri, who had invaded Palestine from the east. This nation has by some been identified with the Hebrews, a name given to the Israelites by the inhabitants of Canaan. If this be so, then the Exodus, if it ever happened, must have taken place about the year 1400 B.C., and therefore the oppression under Rameses II. becomes impossible. Hommel accordingly supposes the Pharaoh of the Exodus to have been Amenophis II., who was on the throne in the year 1450 B.C. Most critics, however, who identify the Ḥabiri with the Israelites, regard the story of the sojourn in Egypt and the Exodus under Moses as a myth.

The arguments against these views may be summarised as follows.

1. We are told, and there is no reason to doubt its truth, that Pithom and Raamses were built for the Pharaoh of the oppression by the Israelites. The excavations of Dr. Naville at Tell-el-Maskhuta have proved that

Pithom was built during the reign of Rameses the Great.

2. The identification of the Ḥabiri with the Israelites is very uncertain. The descendants of Jacob never called themselves Hebrews. The name was given them by the Canaanites. The word signifies "those from the other side," and may possibly refer to invaders coming from the east side of the River Jordan. For centuries before the Exodus such invasions had taken place, and, if the name Ḥabiri is to be identified with Hebrews, then it may very well have been a general designation for foes who came from that direction, and finally became attached to the Israelites when they permanently settled in the country.

3. Budde makes a strong point when he says that, "Superior to all attacks and doubts there remains Israel's own self-consciousness. It is inconceivable that a free people should have stamped on the memory of their ancestors the brand of a disgraceful servitude, unless it had a foundation of historical truth."

But then Budde goes on to express the opinion that most probably it was not the whole people of Israel that fell under the

Egyptian bondage, but only the descendants of Joseph, the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. Let us apply to this Budde's own test of the self-consciousness of Israel. To do so I must anticipate a little in reference to a subject that will subsequently be more fully dealt with. Critics have shown that the two oldest documents which have been incorporated in the Pentateuch are two histories, compiled in the northern and southern kingdoms respectively. Of these histories the Judæan is perhaps slightly more ancient than the Ephraimitic. Turning to these books, if Budde's view be correct, we should expect to find a full account of the sojourn in Egypt and of the Exodus in the history of the northern kingdom, and silence on the subject in that of the southern. But the facts are quite the reverse. It is the historian of Judah who tells us that a separate district, the land of Goshen, was in Egypt assigned to the Israelites; who mentions the great increase of the people, the fact that they worked in gangs under taskmasters, and that Moses asked for permission to make a three days' journey into the wilderness. It is this author who gives the fullest list of

the plagues, and also mentions the fact that Moses' father-in-law was the priest of Midian.

There is therefore no discord in the self-consciousness of Israel on the question of the oppression and the Exodus. Judah and Ephraim are at one upon this subject.

CHAPTER III

THE BIBLICAL RECORDS

IF we are to attempt to realise the development of the religion of Israel, it will be necessary for us to consider the records in which its history has been preserved. Our whole thought in reference to it will depend upon the critical standpoint which we adopt.

When Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees, we may assume that he was familiar with the style of writing common in Babylonia at the time. It is called "cuneiform," by which we understand "wedge-shaped letters" imprinted on tablets of clay, which were afterwards baked hard. It is evident that records of such a character might be written and preserved in large cities, but would be quite unsuited to the tent-life of a sheikh, who with his flocks and herds travelled from place to place in

search of water and pasture. We may therefore assume that neither Abraham nor any of the patriarchs left records of their lives. Their stories were handed down from father to son by oral tradition.

We therefore turn to the opening books of the Bible, which are commonly known as the Books of Moses. The older theory in regard to them was that every word in them was actually written by Moses, except perhaps the account of his death. All the laws regulating worship, life, and conduct were his work. The subsequent religious history of Israel up to the Exile was therefore not an ascent, but a descent. It was a falling away from the precepts of the great law-giver. On this theory therefore there was no development.

Now to the ordinary uncritical reader of the Old Testament it is the writings of the prophets which present the greatest difficulty. At times they seem obscure. They deal with events with which the reader is not familiar. Sometimes they appear to mingle the present with the future in a way which is hard to understand. The real reason

of this is that the ordinary reader has not grasped the historical standpoint of the prophets. He turns from one writer to another without realising that possibly three hundred years may separate two books which lie close beside each other in the pages of Holy Writ. Before we can enter into the work of any prophet there are certain things which must be understood—*viz.* what was his historical setting? who were the people amongst whom he lived? what were they thinking about to whom he gave his message? how far was he in accordance with, or opposed to, the general trend of public opinion? and, lastly, what external influences were likely to have affected his thought? When this has been done the message of the prophet generally appears plain and distinct.

On the other hand, the ordinary reader can go through the so-called Books of Moses without realising at all the difficult problems which they suggest. Now and then some apparent contradiction may puzzle him, but he puts it aside as of no moment. You see, "it is all in the Bible"! And yet it is the Hexateuch which really presents difficulties to the

thoughtful student, and to the elucidation of which so much Christian learning and research are being devoted.

If we were to open the Old Testament for the first time, our natural idea would be that the various books were written by the persons whose names they bear. One instance in disproof of this will suffice. Take the two books of Samuel. The death of the prophet is told in 1 Samuel xxv. It is therefore clear that he could not have written the seven remaining chapters of this book, nor any of 11 Samuel. Again, Jewish tradition is of little use to us on the question of authorship. In the Babylonian Talmud there is a passage which probably dates from the second century of the Christian era, where we are told that Moses wrote his own books and Job; that Jeremiah wrote his own book, Kings, and Lamentations; that Hezekiah and "his men" wrote Isaiah, Proverbs, Canticles, and Ecclesiastes; that the men of the Great Synagogue wrote Ezekiel, the twelve prophets, Daniel, and Esther. On the other hand, we read in 11 Esdras (90 A.D.) that the original law was burnt, and that Ezra was inspired to dictate

again the twenty-four books of the Old Testament, and seventy apocryphal books. While this latter statement shows that the Jews really knew no more about the matter than they did about the route of the Exodus, yet it is reasonable to infer from it that, during or after the Exile there was, at least, an important revision of the books of the older covenant.

But such divergence of opinion compels us to have recourse to the internal evidence afforded by the books themselves. First, I notice the fact that we find, in the earlier parts of the Old Testament, quotations from books which are now lost. They are poetical in form, and apparently contemporaneous with the events of which they treat. In some cases, such as the Song of Deborah and Barak, they present a picture which does not in all respects harmonise with the view presented by the prose historian. This suggests the thought that, as in the case of other nations, so with the Jews, the first-fruits of their genius was a ballad literature 'recounting the brave deeds of heroes. Collections of these ballads were apparently made at an early date, and the

names of two such anthologies have been preserved. These are "The Book of the Wars of Yahweh," and "The Book of Jashar" or the Upright. The former must have described how Yahweh fought for the Israelites, and drove out the nations before them; the latter contained ballads about upright men, judges, warriors, and princes.

Let us now consider some of the problems suggested by the three books of Genesis, Exodus, and Deuteronomy.

At its commencement the book of Genesis contains two accounts of the Creation. In the first, which is clearly connected with the Babylonian Genesis, we have a clear sequence of events. The work of creation advances from the lower to the higher—vegetation, lower animals, man. The creation of man and woman is described in language similar to that used of the lower animals: "Male and female created He them." In the second account a man is apparently created first, then vegetables, then animals, and finally we have a graphic story telling us how a woman was taken out of the man. Further, in the first account God is simply styled Elohim, in the

latter the name Yahweh is introduced. It is impossible to believe that the same author could have written two consecutive accounts which present such marked features of difference.

Again, in the story of the Flood similar phenomena are apparent. Here we have traces of the actual interweaving of two different narratives. In one verse we read that "clean animals" were to be taken into the ark by sevens, and only two of the unclean; in a subsequent verse only two of each kind were taken. It is also remarkable that we have previously been told nothing of the division of animals into "clean" and "unclean."

It is further to be noted in the book of Genesis that the patriarchs sometimes address God as Yahweh, but in the book of Exodus we are distinctly told that by His name Yahweh He was not known to them.

Let us now compare certain parts of Exodus with Deuteronomy. In the twentieth chapter of the former book Moses instructed the people to make an altar of earth for their burnt offerings and peace offerings, and God promised to meet and bless the worshippers in every

place where He recorded His name. In the early historical books we everywhere find this acted on. Apparently, almost every village had its own altar, its "high place," where the people met for worship.

But in the twelfth chapter of Deuteronomy we have completely different directions. No sacrifices are to be offered unto Yahweh upon the "high places." There is to be one central sanctuary for the tribes, and this alone shall be the legal place for burnt offerings and peace offerings.

How are we to explain this? Can the same legislator have given such opposite instructions? We are forced to reply in the negative. We ask, then, What are the facts which underlie this change of legislation? We have to remember that the Israelites and the Canaanites belonged to the same Semitic stock. When the former got possession of a district in Canaan they simply took over the "high place" of the previous inhabitants, and on it offered sacrifices to Yahweh instead of to Baal. Yahweh was Israel's God as other nations had their Baals. Time passed, and we find the Israelites addressing Yahweh as "their Baal,"

and naming their sons from this title. In popular opinion Yahweh sank into the position of one of the many Baals. Once this took place it is easy to see how the Israelites fell into idolatry, and this idolatry had its origin in the permission to sacrifice at the various "high places." Circumstances were too strong for this early rule to work satisfactorily. Moses may possibly have authorised it, but was he the only prophet inspired by God? If God taught Isaiah that it was a bad thing, had Hezekiah no right to try to alter it? Was the Jewish nation not to develop, but to remain stationary under a cast-iron system of ritual? Surely the Spirit of God was in the later prophets as He had been in Moses, and they saw that the system of indiscriminate sacrifice was destroying religion, and that in a little time "the peculiar people" would simply be one of the many sects of the worshippers of the sun and of the powers of nature.

What then should the prophets of Yahweh do? Clearly the "high places" must be destroyed. Sacrifice must be centralised. This must be the first step in the purification of

the worship of Yahweh. And that is what they did. They published a second law directing the change, and they claimed, and rightly claimed, to be acting under the guidance of the Spirit of God. Moreover, they were actually carrying out the spirit of the Mosaic legislation, the essence of which is found in the commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods but Yahweh."

We have now to meet the question, How far is the title "the Law of Moses" justified by historical investigation?

It is evident to any one reading the book of Genesis that parts of the law were prior to the Exodus, and were the common heritage of the Semitic race. I need only quote the observance of the Sabbath, the institution of sacrifice, the payment of tithe, the rite of circumcision, the prohibition of murder, adultery, and theft. We have also seen that certain regulations are of much later date than the time of Moses. But we have a right to say that the basis of all Hebrew legislation is to be referred to him. He was the author of the moral law of Israel. Subsequent generations claimed the right to adapt the laws of ritual

to the altered circumstances of their own day, but all moral development proceeded upon the lines laid down by Moses. Alterations were mainly ceremonial. I therefore conclude that, as we speak of the Psalms of David, so we can speak of the Law of Moses, only with better reason in the latter case.

We now come to the further question, How did the so-called Books of Moses reach their present form?

It may, I think, be safely asserted that in its general outline and accepted results there is nothing in modern criticism to alarm the most timid reader of the Bible. It may call for a readjustment of ideas, but, in place of a confused historical picture, it gives us a clear and definite outline of events, where the hand of God is plainly evident leading the people onward unto the coming of Christ. Moses made the nation of Israel. His legislation marked out the lines on which that nation was to advance. How much of it was actually reduced to writing in his own day we can scarcely say. We are told that the "Ten Words" were inscribed on stone. In the wild times that followed the invasion of Palestine

there could have been little opportunity for literary pursuits. For the mass of the people oral tradition must have been the chief avenue of instruction. Records were, however, probably kept in the time of the judges, and certainly in that of the early kings; but the beginnings of the Hexateuch, as we have it, date from a period subsequent to the division of the kingdom, and when the prophets had become a power in the land. Elijah in the northern kingdom had denounced the worship of Baal. Jehu, under the influence of Elisha, had extirpated the worshippers of that deity in Samaria. Is it not natural that, at a time when the cry, "Yahweh He is God," was the watchword of reform, the prophets should attempt to give the people a consecutive account of all that Yahweh had done for them? And this is what actually happened in both kingdoms. The book composed in the north we call *E*, because its author or authors avoid the use of the word Yahweh in Genesis, and use the name Elohim for God. The corresponding history in the southern kingdom is called *J*, on account of the use of the title Yahweh (Jehovah).

Both these books must have been founded upon older documents as well as upon tradition. The author in each case had access to information outside the reach of the other. Before the fall of Samaria (722 B.C.) a copy of the northern record must have found its way to Jerusalem. The prophetic historians there combined parts of this narrative with their own work, and produced a volume which is styled *JE*. This book, along with the kernel of Deuteronomy, was the Jewish law up to the time of the Exile.

From that period onward the influence of the prophets diminished, and the importance of the priesthood increased. About this time another book was composed dealing with the origins of Israel. Critics call it *P*, or the Priests' Code, in distinction from *JE*, which was the work of the prophets. *P* is a history with a clearly marked style. The same expressions occur again and again. Its author delighted in statistics, and provided copious genealogies. In the book of Genesis he shows his familiarity with early Babylonian records. He gives laws, with the circumstances of their origin, and the first instance of their observance. The book

is a systematic work, written with a clear purpose. After the Return it was taken as the basis of the Hexateuch, and the narrative of *JE* was combined with it.

Such, in their broad outline, are the results of modern investigation in regard to the Books of Moses. Minor details will never be of interest to the general reader, and he suffers no loss thereby. Let me give an instance of what I mean. In that beautiful and scholarly volume, the book of Judges in the Polychrome Bible, edited by Dr. G. F. Moore, we read in the tenth chapter that "Jair the Gileadite had thirty sons who rode on thirty asses." But the colours direct our attention to the fact that the number of Jair's sons is derived from one source, and the interesting item of the thirty asses from another! Old Testament criticism can only interest the general reader in so far as it throws light on the history and religious development of the chosen people. It is really valuable only in so far as it leads to a more reverent appreciation of the ways of God with men.

CHAPTER IV

YAHWEH

I N the previous chapter we took a brief but necessary digression into the paths of modern criticism. We must now return to the narrative of the Exodus. I have already pointed out that the testimony of the Israelites was undivided in regard to the reality of the oppression in Egypt. On one other point also all Israel was unanimous. It was Yahweh, their God, who proved too strong alike for the armies and for the deities of Egypt. It was Yahweh who led them through the wilderness, and gave them the law. It was Yahweh who drove out the nations of Canaan from before their face.

Who then was Yahweh?

There can be no doubt that in Hebrew writing of the historical period the name is connected with the Hebrew verb "to be." In our Authorised Version it is translated, "I

am that I am." This is quite impossible. In the first place the Hebrew verb does not mean "to be" essentially, but phenomenally. Secondly, the imperfect tense, which is here used, has the force of the future and not of the present. Thirdly, the idea of Yahweh describing Himself as "the self-existent" is a metaphysical idea, alien to Hebrew thought. The writer, in the book of Exodus, represents God speaking of Himself as, "I will be"; and as Yahweh, "He will be," when addressed by others. What He will be is not mentioned, but such expressions as "Surely I will be with thee" naturally occur to the mind.

In the next place we ask, Did the Israelites know of Yahweh before the Exodus? Here the Biblical testimony is conflicting. The historian of the northern kingdom tells us expressly that they did not: "By my name Yahweh was I not known to them." On the other hand, the historian of Judah puts the name Yahweh into the mouths of the patriarchs, while the later historian of the Exile asserts that the name of Moses' mother was Yokebed—"Yahweh is my glory." How shall we reconcile these statements?

If the name of Moses' mother really was Yokebed, we must agree with Professor Davidson that the name of Yahweh was known to the Israelites before the Exodus. On the other hand, it seems equally certain that up to this crisis God was not worshipped by them as Yahweh. It may, however, help us to ask, Was the name Yahweh in use among any other nation prior to its adoption by the Israelites? Now Moses was tending the flocks of Jethro, the priest of Midian, when the revelation came to him. The special tribe of the Midianites to which Jethro belonged is elsewhere called Kenite. This tribe of the Kenites entered Canaan with the Israelites, and was present at the capture of Jericho. They afterwards conquered a district for themselves, and were finally incorporated with the tribe of Judah. At a later date, when David took vengeance upon the Amalekites for the destruction of Ziklag, he made a wise use of the spoil by sending rich presents to the different towns of Judah which had sheltered and befriended him during his exile, and amongst those mentioned are "the cities of the Kenites."

Coming further down in history, we read of the Rechabites, who were a sub-division of the Kenites. In 842 B.C. Jehu overthrew the house of Ahab and the worshippers of Baal. In the narrative, Jonadab, the son of Rechab, appears as an enthusiast for Yahweh. Jehu took him with him, that Jonadab might behold his zeal. Together they effected the destruction of the Baal worshippers in Samaria. Two hundred and seventy years later, in the time of the prophet Jeremiah, the Rechabites are represented as the most loyal of all the worshippers of Yahweh. Jonadab, their ancestor, had seen that it was intercourse with the Canaanites and the pollutions of city life which were leading to such apostasy from Yahweh among the tribes of Israel. He accordingly directed his descendants to go back to the old nomadic pastoral life which their ancestors had lived in the land of Midian. They drank no wine; they built no cities; they possessed no vineyards nor fields; and Yahweh declared that, because they had observed these commandments, Jonadab, the son of Rechab, should not want a man to stand before Him for ever.

Further, in the early history of Israel, Yahweh is identified with Mount Sinai. Moses led his flocks to the "mountain of God." To the "mountain of God" he guided the Israelites, that they might meet with Yahweh and learn His law. When the Israelites set out from Sinai, Yahweh remained on the mountain, but on three different occasions is represented as promising to send His angel before the tribes. In the time of Deborah it was from Sinai that Yahweh came to help :

"

Yahweh, when Thou wentest out of Seir,

When Thou marchedst out of the field of Edom,

The mountains quaked at the presence of Yahweh,

Even yon Sinai, at the presence of Yahweh, the God

of Israel.

Or take again this from the so-called " Blessing of Moses " :

Yahweh came from Sinai,
And rose up from Seir unto them.

Analogous to these are the descriptions of Yahweh in the Psalms : " He rode upon a cherub and did fly." Yahweh sat upon the winged spirit of the storm. Fire was His symbol. The thunder was His voice.

One other fact, and we shall be in a position to draw our conclusion. After the Exodus, when Jethro, the priest of Midian, visited Moses at the "mountain of God," it was he, and not Moses nor Aaron, who offered the sacrifice to Yahweh.

I therefore conclude that Yahweh was the name under which the Kenites worshipped God, and that Moses' father-in-law, the priest of Midian, was Yahweh's priest. Yahweh dwelt on the mountain. He was the God of the wild steppe and of pastoral life. I do not say that the connotation of the name Yahweh was the same to Moses and to Jethro, the shepherd-priest. I only say that for its origin we have to turn to Sinai and the Kenites.

May not these considerations also account for the fact that the historian of Judah makes the patriarchs address God as Yahweh? Judah was a composite tribe. It comprised different elements, and of these one of the most important were those "who dwelt in the cities of the Kenites." But the name Yahweh had been that by which the Kenites had always addressed God, and so the historian puts it naturally enough into the mouth of Abraham.

But, granting all this, it only takes us one step backward, and does not explain the name or its origin. But I have already pointed out that Ea is the earliest name for God of which we have any record. Among the primitive Sumerians Ea was God the Creator, father of Tammuz, the sun-god. I have also pointed out that with the advent of the Semites the sun-god became supreme. They called him, not Tammuz, but Merodach, "Bel-Merodach"—Merodach, our Lord.

What then happened to Ea, the Creator? For neither the Semites of Asia, nor the Egyptians of Africa, whose supreme god was the sun, ever regarded him as the Creator. In Egypt Rā, the sun-god, was the child of Ptah. In Accadia he was the son of Ea and Dam-kina. He was supreme because he was more magnificent and powerful than his father who begat him.

Recent decipherments of Babylonian cuneiform inscriptions have thrown much light on this question. The Semitic belief was that, when Merodach overcame Tiamat, the great dragon of the abyss—a story familiar to us in the legend of Bel and the Dragon—he

was made king of all the gods. Even Ea, his father, gave him up all his privileges. I quote from the Babylonian hymn of creation :

Ea heard, and he rejoiced in heart ;

Thus he spake :—He whose renowned name his father's name so glorified,—

He shall be like me, and Ea shall be his name.

The total of my commands, all of them, let him possess.

The whole of my pronouncements he, even he, shall make known.

That is to say, Ea voluntarily merged himself in Merodach, the sun-god. What he did, all the gods did. Nebo was the god of prophecy, son of Merodach and Zarpanitu. But we read, "Nebo is Merodach." Sin was the moon-god, "the illuminator of the night." But we read, "Sin is Merodach." It is the first striving after monotheism.

But the name of Ea, the Creator, the father of the gods, was not forgotten. It is spelled in different ways—Ea, Aa, Ya'a, and Yah. And in Babylonian tablets we have the following : "Bel-Ya'a," Bel is Yah ; "Nabu-Yah," Nebo is Yah ; "Yah-Dagunu," Yah is Dagon. Thus we see that Ea, Aa, Yah,

is the father of the gods, and the Creator of the world. Now turn to Psalm lxviii., and you read: "Praise Him in His name Yah, and rejoice before Him."

What, then, is our conclusion? It is this. When Moses desired to teach the children of Israel about God, he went back to the oldest name for God known to the human race—God the Creator, Ea or Yah.

CHAPTER V

MOSES

WE shall now endeavour to form some picture of the mental and spiritual conflict which Moses underwent before he decided on making the attempt to deliver Israel. He had fled for safety to the wilderness. In the quiet home of Jethro he lived a pastoral life. During his early days he had become acquainted with the best of the world's learning. In the wilderness, like John the Baptist, he learned of God. Perhaps he might better be compared with St. Paul. Both enjoyed early years of education and culture. Then the wilderness entered into the life of each before he was ready for his great work. Accustomed to the magnificent, yet sensual, ritual of Egypt, the simplicity of the religious rites practised in his adopted home must have strongly appealed to Moses. In the silences of the

wilderness, in the storms that raged round Sinai, God spake to Moses, and Moses communed with God, and with himself.

As he followed his flock the thought of his brethren in Egypt must have always been present to his mind. He was safe, but they were slaves. Slowly the idea of their deliverance grew within him. Then, as always happens, one day the crisis came. The voice of God seemed to him to become articulate, and to order him to the work. He shrank from a task apparently so impossible, but an imperative necessity drove him onward. He was a timid man, and he was no speaker. But his conscience would admit of no excuse. God, as he had learned to know Him, was All-powerful. Aaron, his brother, could speak for him. So God impelled him; until, at last, in the full consciousness of a divine mission, inspired by new and noble thoughts of God, he resolved to free his people, and to set the feet of Israel upon the path which she was destined to follow in the Counsels of the Eternal.

Without entering into details as regards the Mosaic legislation, we may say that it

centred in the "Ten Words," and in the Ark of the Covenant.

In the older histories the latter is styled the Ark of Yahweh. In the prophetic narratives it is distinctly spoken of as in some sense the dwelling-place of Yahweh. On one occasion we read that the ark went before the people three days' journey to seek out a resting-place for the tribes. When the ark set forward Moses said, "Rise up, O Yahweh, and let Thine enemies be scattered, and let them that hate Thee flee before Thee."¹ When the day's march was over he said, "Return, O Yahweh, to the ten thousands of the thousands of Israel." As we have seen, the origin of the idea of an ark is to be traced back to the first beginnings of Semitic religion. In Egypt also its use was universal. It was a portable shrine by means of which the god could accomplish journeys. Sometimes it contained a sacred stone or fetish connected with the deity; at others an actual image of the god.

What did the ark of Yahweh contain?

Some critics are of opinion that, like other

¹ Num. x. 35.

arks, it contained a sacred stone or fetish. To this I cannot assent. Such an idea is contrary to all we know of the Mosaic legislation. You do not simplify the development of religion in Israel by thus belittling Moses. The long religious struggle in Israel, which was not concluded until after the return from the Exile, was the contest between Mosaic ideals and the inherited religious traditions of the Israelites. There seems no sufficient reason for disbelieving the statement that the ark contained two tables of stone or brick, on which the 'Ten Words' were inscribed.

On the other hand, the Ten Words must have originally all been short and simple. As the Christian creeds are an enlargement of the baptismal formula, so some of the commandments were subsequently amplified. The original Decalogue may have been somewhat as follows :

Thou shalt have no other gods before My face.
 Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image.
 Thou shalt not take the name of Yahweh for a vain end.
 Remember the Sabbath day to hallow it.
 Honour thy father and thy mother.
 Thou shalt do no murder.
 Thou shalt not commit adultery.

Thou shalt not steal.
Thou shalt not bear false witness.
Thou shalt not covet.

Such was the ethical foundation of the religion of Israel. Yahweh was the God of the nation, and the Ten Words laid down the rules for life and conduct.

Following the Ten Words we have in Exodus xx. 22—xxiii. 33 the most ancient of the laws of Israel. This section comprises two elements, which are known as the Book of the Covenant and the Book of the Judgments respectively. They were combined by the editor of the northern history, which I have already pointed out is known as *E*. The origin of the Book of the Judgments is of great antiquity. Its laws are designed to regulate the life of a people living a simple agricultural existence, and it has been customary for this reason to assert that they were the work of lawgivers and editors subsequent to the time of Moses, and when the Israelites were settled in the land of Canaan. But the recent publication of the code of Hammurabi goes to show that they contain enactments based on the common usages of the Semitic race.

Who then was Hammurabi? He was the Semitic King of Babylon about two thousand two hundred years before Christ. We have many records of his reign, which seems to have lasted for about fifty-five years. These deal with lawsuits, deeds of partnership in business, the sale and purchase of slaves, the hire of labourers, etc. But most important of all is his code of laws, or, as it was called at a later date, "The Judgments of Righteousness which Hammurabi the great king set up." This title immediately suggests "the judgments" of the book of Exodus. Many fragments of this ancient code had been found, identified, and studied, but it was only in the month of January, 1902, that French explorers at Susa disinterred a block of black diorite, nearly eight feet in height, inscribed with the code of Hammurabi, and also containing a very interesting engraving of the king himself, receiving his laws from the sun-god, the judge of heaven and earth.

It is also interesting to note that this king has been identified with 'Amraphel, King of Shinar¹ who, with Arioch, King of Ellasar,

Chedorlaomer, King of Elam, and Tidal, King of Goiim, made war on the Kings of Sodom and Gomorrah. If this be true, Hammurabi was a contemporary of Abraham. The cuneiform inscriptions of his reign tell us that he was King of Babylon and North Babylonia; that he rebelled against the supremacy of Elam; that he overthrew his rival, Eri-aku, King of Larsa; and, after conquering Sumer and Accad, was the first sovereign of a united Babylonia. Eri-aku, King of Larsa, has been clearly identified with the Arioch, King of Ellasar, mentioned in Genesis.

Let us now compare some of the sections of the code of Hammurabi with the corresponding passages of the Book of the Judgments in Exodus.

A DANGEROUS OX

Exodus xxi. 28

“ If an ox gore a man or woman that they die, the ox shall surely be stoned, and his flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall be quit. But if the ox was wont to gore in times past, and it hath been testified to his owner, and he hath not kept him in, but that

he hath killed a man or woman, the ox shall be stoned, and his owner also shall be put to death. If there be laid on him a ransom, then he shall give for the redemption of his life whatsoever is laid upon him."

Code of Hammurabi

250. "If a wild bull in his charge has gored a man, and caused him to die, that case has no remedy."

251. "If the ox has pushed a man, by pushing has made known his vice, and he has not blunted his horn, has not shut up his ox, and that ox has gored a man of gentle birth and caused him to die, he shall pay half a mina of silver."

LEX TALIONIS

In the case of the *lex talionis* the similarity between the two codes is very striking.

Exodus xxi. 23

"But, if any mischief follow, then shalt thou give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe."

Code of Hammurabi

196. "If a man has caused the loss of a gentleman's eye, his eye one shall cause to be lost."

197. "If he has shattered a gentleman's limb, one shall shatter his limb."

200. "If a man has made the tooth of a man that is his equal to fall out, one shall make his tooth fall out."

COMPENSATION FOR INJURIES

Exodus xxi. 18

"If men contend, and one smiteth the other with a stone or with his fist, and he die not, but keep his bed: if he arise again, and walk abroad upon his staff, then shall he that smote him be quit: only he shall pay for the loss of his time, and shall cause him to be thoroughly healed."

Code of Hammurabi

206. "If a man has struck a man in a quarrel, and has caused him a wound, that man shall swear 'I do not strike him knowing,' and shall answer for the doctor."

TRESPASS

Exodus xxii. 5

“If a man cause a field or vineyard to be eaten, and shall let his beast loose, and it feed in another man’s field; of the best of his own field and of the best of his own vineyard shall he make restitution.”

Code of Hammurabi.

57. “If a shepherd has caused the sheep to feed on the green corn, has not come to an agreement with the owner of the field, without the consent of the owner of the field has made the sheep feed off the field, the owner shall reap his fields; the shepherd who without consent of the owner of the field had fed off the field shall give over and above 20 *gur* of corn per *gan* to the owner of the field.”

What conclusion is to be drawn from these and similar passages? Did Moses copy from the code of Hammurabi? I do not think so. The Babylonian king did not invent the laws. All he could have done was to codify existing customs, to clear away ambiguities, to create

a uniform standard which could be appealed to by all the inhabitants of his great empire, and to give to it a sanction at once royal and divine. But when Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees, whether the code of Hammurabi had been then reduced to writing or not, the principles underlying it had formed the rules for life and conduct. Centuries later Moses drew up a statute book for Israel, and he too codified long established and similar Semitic usages.

The character of the Book of the Covenant is quite different from that of the Book of the Judgments. The latter is put hypothetically throughout. If a man does certain things, certain consequences will follow. The former contains definite directions dealing with religion and morality, and given by Moses to the Israelites on the authority of Yahweh. Gods of silver and gold are not to be made. Altars are to be of earth, and may be built in any place where Yahweh has caused His name to be remembered. How this is to be understood is evident from the sacred history. Joshua built an altar on Mount Ebal; Gideon at Ophrah; Samuel at Ramah; David on the

threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite ; while Elijah complains of the destruction of the altars of Yahweh as an act of sacrilege, and he himself repaired the altar on Mount Carmel. If an altar was built of stone, it was to be of unhewn stone. Sacrifices are to be offered only unto Yahweh.

In each year three feasts are to be observed—the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering. Land is to be tilled for six years, and then permitted to lie fallow for one year. Precautions are taken to secure the rights of the fatherless, the widow, and the poor. Such are the principal provisions of Israel's oldest code of laws.

One or two other points must not be overlooked in the consideration of the origin of the religion of Israel. The choice of Yahweh as the God of Israel was a definite and deliberate act on the part of the tribes. Their ancestors in Babylon worshipped the sun and the moon. So did the Egyptians among whom they had sojourned. The Canaanites worshipped deities who were supposed to dwell at the different local shrines. Other nations adored the deified

founder of their race. Israel chose Yahweh. As Budde puts it—"Israel's religion became ethical because it was a religion of choice and not of nature, because it rested on a voluntary decision which established an ethical relation between the people and its God for all time."

Again, even the earliest prophets never speak as though they were setting up a new ideal of life and conduct. They always appeal to an existing law, which those whom they addressed ought to be following. But the law to which they appeal always deals with morality, and not with questions of ritual.

Lastly, with the literary prophets of Israel this appeal to the moral law is elevated into an enthusiasm, a veritable passion for righteousness. Everything is referred to a divine standard. The one question is, Does the nation do what is right before the face of Yahweh? When Amos startled the northern kingdom it was as the spokesman of God that he declared, "Though ye offer me your burnt offerings and meal offerings, I will not accept them; neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away

from me the noise of thy songs ; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.”¹

Fifty years later the village prophet of Judah had the same message : “ Wherewith shall I come before Yahweh, and bow myself before the high God ? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old ? Will Yahweh be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil ? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul ? He hath showed thee, O man, what is good ; and what doth Yahweh require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God ? ”²

¹ Amos v. 22-4.

² Mic. vi. 6-8.

CHAPTER VI

CANAAN

THE Israelites apparently crossed the Jordan into Palestine as an undivided host. Subsequent hostilities separated the tribes. Judah and Simeon, with the Kenites, occupied the highlands of Central and Southern Judæa. Joshua, at the head of the powerful descendants of Joseph, penetrated northward to the plain of Esdraelon. But Palestine as a whole was not conquered at Joshua's death. Most of the larger cities, the cultivated valleys, and the sea-coast, remained in the hands of their former inhabitants. For centuries the struggle was continued. Now and again, when a common danger threatened, the tribes united at the call of Yahweh; as when Barak and Deborah routed Sisera, or when Saul summoned the people to take the field against the Philistines. Jerusalem was not taken till the reign of David, and then at last may the

kingdom of Israel be said to have been consolidated.

In fact, what took place in Palestine was very similar to what happened in Babylonia after the Semitic invasion. The Semites then absorbed the native Accadian population, but adopted much of their religion and civilisation. The Canaanites seem to have been on a higher level as regards arts and culture than the rude pastoral tribes who invaded their country. As we have seen, they could carry on a correspondence in the Babylonian language with the King of Egypt. Their cities were strongly fortified, and they possessed chariots of iron. The inhabitants of Palestine and the Israelites were of kindred race, and as years passed old distinctions became obliterated.

But this process had a deteriorating influence upon the tribes. The religious rites of the conquered were largely adopted by the conquerors, and the worship of Yahweh was reduced almost to the level of the cults of the Canaanites.

Let us now try to form some idea of the religion of the Canaanites when brought into contact with the children of Israel.

Everywhere we find the worship of the Baals. Each Baal was supposed to give fertility to his particular locality, especially by supplying streams of water. Tribute was therefore paid them from the fruits of the ground. But they were also the authors of animal fruitfulness. Their religious rites therefore included what the Christian conscience must consider debasing immorality. Sacred fountains, evergreen trees, or rocks, were supposed to be the homes of the Baals. They were worshipped at the "high places," where their altars were of unhewn stone. If a god is believed to inhabit a stone, to chip it would be an insult or possibly an injury to Deity. In primitive times the altar consisted of only one stone or pillar, called a *Mazzebah*, on which the blood of the sacrificial victim, or the oil of the vegetable offering, was poured. This pillar was therefore both an altar and a divine dwelling-place. In later days the altar and the stone symbol were often separated, especially at much frequented sanctuaries, where the former had to be large and conspicuous.

In addition to the sacred pillar there was

generally beside the altar an Asherah, or sacred pole. This word is incorrectly rendered in the A.V. as "a grove." Much doubt, however, still hangs about its meaning. Was there a goddess named Asherah? Kuenen and others think there was. It seems more probable that, when the name Asherah apparently stands for a goddess, the sacred historians or their copyists confused the word with Ashtoreth or Astarte, whose prototype was Istar, daughter of Sin, the moon-god. Other critics believe the Asherahs to have had a phallic origin. This view is apparently nearer the truth, although Professor Robertson Smith has made a strong case against it. For we must remember that human fruitfulness was looked upon in the same light as that of other animals. The idea of reproduction lay at the root of the religion of Canaan, and undoubtedly these Asherahs were sometimes inscribed with phallic symbols. However, in the present state of our knowledge, some may prefer to accept the view which sees in them a survival of tree-worship, while the Mazzebah represents the survival of stone-worship; each having been believed to be the home of Deity.

The religious rites of the Canaanites were therefore largely connected with agriculture. But, until the settlement in Canaan, the Israelites on the other hand had been a pastoral and not an agricultural people. Subsequently, three of their great feasts had reference to the fruits of the ground. The Passover indeed points to an earlier period of nomadic existence, and in its Jewish form had direct reference to the Exodus. In later years it formed part of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was the opening festival of the harvest season, and included the offering of a sheaf of barley. Fifty days after this brought the Israelites to Pentecost, which marked the close of the grain harvest, when the wheat, the latest of the cereals in Palestine, was gathered in. In the early autumn the Feast of Tabernacles celebrated the return from the olive gardens and vineyards.

If, then, we keep the Passover distinct, as undoubtedly it originally was, we have three agricultural festivals among the Jews—the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Ingathering. But agricultural festivals are not celebrated by pastoral tribes.

In the case of the Israelites, therefore, their observance was subsequent to the settlement in Canaan. But these feasts must have been very similar to those held by the Canaanites in honour of their local Baals. Thus we can see at once how great an influence Canaanite practices would have upon the Israelites when they were adapting themselves to their new surroundings.

In addition to the influence of Canaanite ritual, we must give due weight to the inherited beliefs and traditions of the tribes as part of the great Semitic race. Of these we have many instances in the sacred history.

Teraphim or household gods were in use down to the time of the prophet Hosea. Apparently they had their origin in ancestor-worship. Sometimes they were life-size. It is thought by some that originally they were mummied human heads, for which subsequently images of wood or metal were adopted. These were placed near to the door of the house. We read in the book of Exodus that, if a slave refused his freedom at the end of his six years of service, then his master brought him to the door, to the god, and bored his ear through

with an awl. Thus the slave was enrolled as a member of the family, and was given a share in its past as well as in its future.¹

Some excellent scholars are of opinion that in later times the teraphim took the form of images of Yahweh. I cannot think so. While the ephod was, or contained, an image of Yahweh, there is no hint that the teraphim were connected with Him in any way whatsoever. It must be remembered that at first Yahwism had no distinctive doctrine of a future life. Yahweh was the war-god and the national deity. Hence, side by side with the national Yahwism, the old ancestor-worship was to be found existing in family life. The teraphim supplied a want. When Yahwism had developed its doctrine of a future life the use of the teraphim ceased in Israel. Hence it was that a man might in public be an enthusiastic worshipper of Yahweh, and yet have teraphim in his own house. Belief in them was at least common to the whole Semitic race, and in the book of the prophet Ezekiel we find Nebuchadnezzar using them for purposes of divination.

¹ Ex. xxi. 2-6.

Frequently connected with the teraphim was the ephod. This word is used in two different senses in the Old Testament—(1) a priestly garment made originally of white linen, and (2) in the books of Samuel it is mentioned as a means of ascertaining the will of Yahweh. The priest is said to carry it. Abiathar brought it in his hand to David. It seems to be referred to in the book of Isaiah: "The silver overlaying of thy graven images, and the gold attachment (or casing) of thy molten images."¹ Dr. Driver concludes that, in this connection, the ephod was the gold casing of an oracular image. There can, indeed, be little doubt that the ephod was, or contained, an image of Yahweh.

We come now to the mysterious Urim and Thummim, which seem to have been mainly used for bringing guilt to light or demonstrating innocence. If the Massoretic pronunciation really represents the original words, there is no doubt as to their meaning. Urim must signify "light," and Thummim "perfection" or "innocence." It seems possible, however, that the terms have a Babylonian origin, and

¹ Isa. xxx. 22.

have reference to "the oracular decision of the gods." They were certainly distinct from the precious stones in the breastplate of the high priest, although carried in a pouch connected with it. Their use was a priestly privilege. They were probably not different from the oracular lots common amongst other nations of antiquity, and may have been two stones in the shape of dice, and used in connection with the ephod or oracular image. It is worthy of note that, with the rise of the prophets, and their higher conceptions as to the revelation of God, the use both of the ephod and of the Urim and Thummim disappeared.

Belief in magic and necromancy was also universal. It could not have been otherwise. Belief in demons necessitates sorcery. The early Semite believed himself to be surrounded by numberless superhuman agents, some of which ministered to his comfort, others to his hurt. Plagues and sicknesses, mental or bodily diseases, storm and flood, were ascribed to jinns or hostile powers, whose influence could only be counteracted by spells and incantations. Saul might endeavour to banish those who were reputed to have familiar spirits, but his

followers had no difficulty in bringing him in the time of his trouble to "a wise woman." At a much later date, under fear of the Assyrian invasion, the practice of necromancy was openly avowed. The people of Jerusalem forsook the worship of Yahweh, and sought those who had familiar spirits, and the wizards who chirped and muttered. In vain did Isaiah endeavour to recall them to the Law and testimony of Yahweh. At last he can only pronounce a sentence of doom, and he does so in the terms of their own superstition. Jerusalem and her people shall be destroyed. The nation shall become a ghost or shade, like the spirits in whom they have believed. "Thou shalt be laid prostrate, and shalt speak out of the ground and thy speech shall be low out of the dust ; and thy voice shall be as of one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and thy speech shall chirp out of the dust."

The state of confusion which existed in Israel during the period of which we are treating, both as regards questions of doctrine and of ritual, is well illustrated by two very ancient stories which have been preserved for us in the book of Judges.

Jephthah the Gileadite was outlawed by the elders of Gilead. He then became captain of a band of freebooters in Eastern Syria. An Ammonite invasion found the Israelites without a leader, and they appealed to Jephthah to come to their rescue. He consented on condition that, if successful, he should be permanent chieftain in Gilead. This was solemnly agreed to at the holy place of Mizpah. Then before Yahweh Jephthah registered a vow that, if he returned victorious, he would sacrifice to Yahweh whomsoever should be the first to meet him. He defeated the Ammonites, and returned in triumph to Mizpah. The first person to meet him was his only daughter, accompanied by a chorus of women. The narrative is very touching alike in its simplicity and reserve. Jephthah may be overwhelmed with grief, but his vow cannot be broken. His daughter's courage supports her father. So Jephthah did to her what he had vowed to do.

That such things were possible in Israel may be seen also by the murder of Agag "before Yahweh" in Gilgal, and by the sacrifice of the seven sons of Saul by David

in order to appease Yahweh, and to put an end to a famine. "They hanged them in the mountain before Yahweh, and they fell all seven together. . . at the beginning of barley harvest." History presents no more pathetic figure than that of Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah.

A psalmist of the Exile asserts that human sacrifices were also offered by the Israelites to other deities :

They mingled themselves with the nations,
 And learned their works ;
 And they served their idols,
 Which became a snare unto them ;
 Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto
 demons,
 And shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons
 and of their daughters,
 Whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan ;
 And the land was polluted with blood.

The second story deals with matters of ritual. Micah, a man living in the highlands of Ephraim, stole eleven hundred shekels of silver from his mother, and she cursed the thief. In fear he restored the money, and his mother took two hundred pieces of silver, and made an image of Yahweh. And we

read, "The man Micah had an house of God, and he made an ephod and teraphim, and consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest." A Levite from Bethlehem-Judah, in search of a settled home, came to Mount Ephraim, and was persuaded by Micah to take up his abode with him, and to act as a sort of private chaplain to his religious establishment. And Micah said, "Now know I that Yahweh will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest." The editor of a later day is careful to add the explanation that at the time "every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

Soon afterwards the Danites, finding it impossible to hold their own in the district assigned to them by Joshua, owing to the hostility of the Philistines, sent five of their number to explore the land, and seek for a quieter home. In their wanderings these men arrived at the house of Micah, and by his voice recognised the Levite as belonging to the south country. After consulting the images, he promised them success in their undertaking. At Laish they found an attractive country, and an unwarlike people dwelling without

thought of danger. On their return home, six hundred Danites, with their families and cattle, resolved to migrate to Laish. On their way they seized the images in Micah's sanctuary, and persuaded the Levite to accompany them. They captured and destroyed Laish, and founded a new town upon the site. Such is the origin of Dan as a religious centre, and of the priesthood which existed there.

No one, calmly considering the state of religion in Israel during the period, and its position in reference to the cults of the Canaanites, could have formed any idea of the future progress of the Hebrew faith. Apparently it was doomed to deteriorate. From such a catastrophe a great national crisis, humanly speaking, saved Israel.

CHAPTER VII

THE RISE OF THE PROPHETS

OF all the struggles for supremacy in which the Israelites were engaged none equalled in duration and intensity the conflict with the Philistines. Originally pirates of Aryan race, with features of distinctly Grecian type, from their home either in Crete or Cyprus they made successive settlements on the coast of Palestine. They may well be compared with the Northmen of a later date; for the Philistines were the Vikings of the East. As in Ireland the Danes had three principal cities—Dublin, Waterford, and Limerick—so the Philistines in Palestine had five—Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron. During the time of Eli they were virtually masters of the whole country. The Israelites were reduced to a humiliating bondage. The men of Judah could say to Samson, “Knowest thou not that the Philistines are rulers over

us?" So completely were they in subjection to their oppressors that even the working of metals was forbidden to them. Not only were they deprived of all arms, but even if they wanted their agricultural implements repaired they were obliged to have recourse to Philistine smiths. The tribes, disheartened, disorganised, without a leader or any central authority, had no chance against the disciplined armies of Philistia. Their extinction as a nation was apparently only a matter of time.

In such a crisis, where was the power to come from which would arouse and unite the people? What would be the rallying-cry which would be taken up by all the tribes of Israel? Where were the agents to be found who would again call forth the dying enthusiasm of the nation?

The power came from God. Yahweh had delivered the Israelites from a more terrible oppression. It was He who had done marvellous things in the land of Egypt, even in the field of Zoan. So the rallying-cry for Israel was, "Yahweh •He is God! Yahweh He is God." The agency in this mighty awakening was the new order of the prophets.

That prophecy at any rate received a new impulse at this time is undoubted. We are distinctly told that he was henceforth called a "nabi," or prophet, who had in previous times been called a "seer." We have no detailed history of the seers. Apparently they did not differ greatly from the soothsayers to be found in other Semitic tribes. Saul brings a present to Samuel in order that the seer may tell him whither his father's asses have strayed. But the new wave of enthusiasm for Yahweh had reached Samuel. Possibly he was its moving spirit. Yahweh alone can make Israel a nation.

Samuel and Saul communed together. What passed between them upon the housetop during that eventful night we cannot say. By what dreams of the future the prophet encouraged his guest we do not know. But when the interview was over the prophet had gained a fresh recruit. Saul publicly joined a band of enthusiasts whom he met after leaving Samuel. "Is Saul also among the prophets?" asked the people, not in contempt but in wonder. This national and religious movement is going to be a greater thing than

they had imagined. It is absorbing all that is best and strongest in the nation. At first its fervour was exhibited in excited gestures, and in wild and whirling words. But it was a real thing. It was indeed an inspiration. Its first great result is seen in the conquest of the Philistines, and in the establishment of the kingdom of Israel.

This twofold character of the prophetic movement must not be overlooked. It was national and it was religious. At first the national aspect somewhat predominated. If the worship of Yahweh was to continue and develop, there must be a nation to worship Him. On the other hand, the tribes of Israel could only be united into a nation by the common worship of the national God. There came indeed a later time when the religious idea could be separated from the national. Israel perished as a nation, but its conception of God became the heritage of the world. This is most noteworthy. Heathen religions perished with the downfall of the nation. The religion of Yahweh received new vitality from the overthrow of the nation of Israel.

The prophets formed themselves into com-

munities. We read of the wives of the prophets coming to Elisha.¹ The members of these prophetic guilds are called in the Old Testament "the sons of the prophets." They lived together in the neighbourhood of the ancient sanctuaries, such as Gilgal and Bethel. In early times the distinction between the priests and the prophets does not seem to have been sharp, and they were certainly very closely connected in the southern kingdom down to the time of the Captivity.

One of the first results of the prophetic movement was the creation of the kingdom of Israel. A central authority was absolutely necessary if the tribes were to make headway against the Philistines. Men like Gideon and Jephthah had previously driven back foreign foes from their own districts, and had subsequently exercised a limited jurisdiction. But the struggle with the Philistines was one for existence, and could only be successful if all were united under the command of a single leader.

The word "theocracy," invented by the Jewish historian Josephus, has tended to obscure

¹ 11 Kings iv. 1.

the imperative necessity for the appointment of a king in Israel. Josephus tells us that, while other nations had different forms of government, Moses gave to the Israelites the unique form of a theocracy. Christian writers have been therefore in the habit of using this word to express the difference between the constitution of Israel and that of other nations. But a wider knowledge of antiquity has shown us that this idea is one which the Jews had in common with the whole Semitic race. In all Semitic cities there existed the idea of a divine king. The Hebrew word for king is *Melech*, and the name of the god of the Ammonites is written variously *Melech*, *Molech*, and *Milcom*. The name of the Tyrian sun-god was *Melkarth*, "king of the city." The kings of Israel were simply vice-regents of *Yahweh*. But it was the same elsewhere. The King of Gebal declares that it was *Astarte*, Queen of Heaven, who placed him on the throne. The Psalmist writes, "I will take up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of *Yahweh*."¹ The King of Gebal is pictured standing before

¹ Psalm cxvi. 12.

Astarte with a cup in his hand, and saying, "I call upon my lady, the sovereign of Gebal, because she hath heard my voice, and hath dealt graciously with me." The tithe which was paid to the sanctuary by all Semitic nations was an acknowledgment that the god was the sovereign of the land.

At the same time, while we admit the necessity for the appointment of a king over the tribes of Israel, we must not forget that it was a great reversal of old ideals. It was bound to repress the free life of the individual Israelite. Rechabites might endeavour to maintain the old free and pastoral life, but for the mass of the people this could not be. The theocratic idea also was bound to lose prominence when the authority of the earthly king was visible and felt. We can therefore well understand the objections which a conservative Israelite would make to the new system. Only an imperative political necessity could have justified the change. The appointment of a king was better than the extinction of the nation by the Philistines.

The prophetic movement had thus resulted in the creation of the kingdom of Israel, but

the support of the prophets was soon withdrawn from Saul. The first break with Samuel took place in the matter of a sacrifice at Gilgal. Saul, compelled to retreat before the Philistines, was there awaiting the attack of the enemy. His army was small and dispirited. Samuel had directed him to wait for seven days, and he would himself come to offer sacrifice on behalf of Israel. The days passed, but Samuel came not. Saul, threatened with the desertion of his army, himself offered a sacrifice. On account of this action the imperious old prophet announced the fall of the dynasty of Saul. Samuel seems indeed to have played the part of a Bismarck to the new kingdom of Israel.

The final rupture was not long delayed. Samuel directed the king to proclaim a "jehad," or religious war, against the Amalekites. This nation had offered a strenuous resistance to the advance of the Israelites after the Exodus. A great battle had been fought at Rephidim, in which the tribes were victorious, but the Amalekites seem at this time to have acted in a peculiarly exasperating manner, harassing the Israelites on their rear and cutting off

stragglers, so that Yahweh Himself is represented as swearing eternal hostility against them. Centuries had indeed passed, but Samuel proclaimed a war of revenge: "Go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass."¹ It was a terrible order. Accordingly, Saul inflicted a defeat from which apparently the nation never recovered; but he spared Agag and the best of the sheep and oxen. Thereupon Samuel declared Saul's final rejection, while he himself "hewed Agag in pieces before Yahweh in Gilgal."² In such a case Samuel was just on the level of his own day. The law was "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth."³ The educated Christian conscience is horror-stricken at such a scene.

Thenceforward prophetic interest centred in David; and it shows how great a grip Saul had obtained upon the nation, that he was able to maintain his position in the face of such hostility. So widespread was his authority that David could find no resting-

¹ 1 Sam. xv. 3.

² 1 Sam. xv. 33.

³ Ex. xxi. 24.

place in the whole kingdom. Not even in the distant territory of the Calebites, although united to the clan by marriage, could he maintain himself. In fact, Saul is one of the great men to whom history has done little justice. We see him in early life the chosen of the people, at one time leading them to victory, and again unconquered by defeat. In later days we watch him grimly holding his own, his life overshadowed with the horror of madness. At his death no one questioned the advantage of a king over the nation. A defeated man, he perished on Mount Gilboa; but he made the reign of David possible.

While David was successfully carrying out the aims of the prophetic movement, we naturally hear little of "the sons of the prophets." Two incidents alone in the religious history of the reign of David attract attention.

The first and most important was the removal of the ark of Yahweh from the half-Canaanite town of Kirjath-jearim to the newly acquired city of Jerusalem. The worship of Yahweh at the various sanctuaries had accustomed the people to the idea that Yahweh

had to some extent dispossessed the local Baals. The plot of ground bought by David from Araunah had no connection with any religious rites. No worship had been instituted there until Yahweh had, by revealing Himself, consecrated the spot. So there David built an altar, and there Solomon erected a temple to afford shelter to the ark of Yahweh.

Yahweh has taken possession of the land of Canaan.

The other incident deals with a question of morality, and in Nathan's treatment of David we see that, from the first, the prophets asserted themselves as the moral teachers of the people. David had committed adultery, and practically murder also. Such an act on the part of a king would have excited little attention in other nations, unless the family of the injured man had been specially powerful. Uriah was not even an Israelite by birth, yet at once the prophet Nathan denounced the monarch's sin. Splendidly graphic is the history of the interview. In the action of Nathan we see the origin of that great position assumed afterwards by the prophets of Israel on all questions of morality.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MONARCHY

DURING all his reign David remained in close connection with the prophets, and they stood by him. Nathan and Gad had free access to him at all times, even when they had to utter unpleasant truths. As David, therefore, according to his lights, was always a consistent servant of Yahweh, his moral and religious standpoint is of interest to the student.

Later ages exalted David's religious position, and in the Christian Church the uncritical reference of the greater number of the Psalms to his authorship has created an imaginary David, who is very unlike the man of history. Yet to David and the prophets of his day Yahweh was a holy and righteous God, and, when His known commandments were broken, the prophet must denounce even the King. On the other hand David was necessarily the

child of his own age. When the ark of Yahweh was brought to Jerusalem, Mount Sion became for him literally the dwelling-place of God. Emigration to foreign countries, on the other hand, must result in the worship of strange gods. He thought to please God, to atone for Saul's blood-guiltiness, and to put an end to a famine, by sacrificing the seven sons of Saul "before the face of Yahweh." He had teraphim actually in his own house. His moral consciousness did not condemn acts of vindictiveness and cruelty, and did not prevent his commending such in his dying hours to his son and successor. Yet to a great extent David realised the prophetic ideals of his own day. When he died Israel was a nation. Led by him to victory after victory the Israelites began to be self-conscious, and to attach a value to their nationality. But as the wars were considered to be the wars of Yahweh, the victories were His also ; while the removal of the ark to Jerusalem was His official recognition as the god of the land.

The building of the Temple is Solomon's greatest contribution to the history of the religion of Israel. I do not think we should

be justified in saying that it had the prophetic approval. The Temple was existing in all its splendour when the prophetic historians wrote the history of Solomon's reign. It had become an inseparable part of the religion of Yahweh. Yet in the opening sentences of Nathan's speech to David, as it has been recorded for us, we can see his dislike to the whole idea. "Thus saith Yahweh, Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in? For I have not dwelt in an house since the day that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle. In all places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel, spake I a word with any of the judges of Israel . . . saying, Why have ye not built me an house of cedar?"¹

The Temple of Solomon was in fact a foreign importation. It was the work of Phœnician artists. It was the outcome of Solomon's love for the magnificent rather than of his religious fervour. It must be remembered that the Temple simply formed part of the great series of buildings which the King erected on Mount

¹ II Sam. vii. 5-7.

Sion, and which included the King's Palace, the house for Pharaoh's daughter, the Throne Porch, the Porch of Pillars, and the House of the Forest of Lebanon. The latter was an arsenal, and derived its name from its four rows of great pillars of cedar. The Temple therefore did not stand out by itself; it was simply part of the royal buildings, and might almost be described as the Chapel Royal of Jerusalem.

In structure it was similar to any ordinary Phœnician temple, and the latter had close affinities to Egypt. It does not appear that the King intended the Temple to supplant any of the existing religious centres. The worship at the "high places" was not abolished. No one would have dreamed of suggesting such a thing. Even in the time of the prophet Hosea the people of Jerusalem offered sacrifices at Gilgal. We must always remember that the Israelites were originally a pastoral people. To those who held conservative views the ancient free worship at the "high places," under the open sky, appeared more desirable than the darkness and mystery of the Temple.

In the reign of Solomon also a definite

foreign policy became necessary for the first time. Israel had become a nation. Domestic enemies had been overcome. As a nation Israel must have dealings with the surrounding peoples. The most advantageous alliance was that with Hiram, King of Tyre. Both kingdoms were benefited. Their fleets were united. Hiram got the use of a port on the Red Sea. Joppa opened up the Mediterranean trade to Solomon.

On the other side of Palestine lay Egypt. Solomon married the daughter of Pharaoh, and this lady appears to have been his principal wife. She was doubtless a better educated woman than any of his Moabite, Ammonite, or Hittite wives. This alliance also opened up great possibilities for trade. For example, Solomon purchased horses and chariots in Egypt, and sold them again to Syrian and Hittite kings. Occupying so central a position, and commanding the great trade-routes between East and West, the kingdom of Israel became of importance among the nations. Wealth flowed into Jerusalem. The city assumed an appearance of Oriental opulence. But such a condition of things does not

necessarily bring with it the prosperity of the people. Shields of beaten gold in the House of the Forest of Lebanon will not feed the poor. The wealth of Solomon did not circulate through the country.

Far otherwise! The cost of maintaining the King's Court became an intolerable burden on the land. The country was divided into twelve districts, each of which had to provide the palace expenses for one month. Judah alone was excepted. The Canaanites were reduced to slavery, and one hundred and sixty thousand of them were employed in quarrying stones and bearing burdens. Israelites too had to submit to forced labour in the forest of Lebanon. The free nomads of the wilderness had become slaves of the monarchy.

In religious matters Solomon's faith was more enlightened, though less intense, than that of David. During his reign no acts which strike us as being immoral are recorded as having been done in honour of Yahweh. The King himself took a prominent part in ceremonies of public worship. But both in temporal and in spiritual matters he gave

offence to the prophets, and the mass of the people sided with them. Outside Jerusalem his religious innovations were not popular. The rude tribesmen disliked the Temple ritual. The permission to his foreign wives to worship their national gods appeared to many absolute apostasy from Yahweh. Yet no attempt was made to proselytise the people, nor was the worship of foreign deities permitted on Mount Sion, the dwelling-place of the God of Israel. The religious toleration granted by Solomon to his wives was a necessary part of his foreign policy.

At Solomon's death the country was ripe for revolt. The northern tribes were oppressed by excessive taxation, and were also jealous of the favour shown to Judah. The prophets, notably Ahijah, were arousing the ignorant with the cry that the religion of Yahweh was being betrayed. Few men could have succeeded Solomon and preserved the kingdom; certainly not the weak and autocratic Rehoboam. For Rehoboam was the Jewish Charles I. In his boyhood courtiers and other parasites had instilled into his mind

many foolish notions. In later life he tried to live up to them. The result was the dismemberment of his kingdom.

On the death of Solomon, about the year 930 B.C., a national convention was held at Shechem, and the northern tribes sought relief from the burden of excessive taxation. Making common cause with them were the prophets, to whom the religious question was probably more important than the political. The ill-advised answers of Rehoboam divided Israel into the northern and southern kingdoms. This revolt was therefore the result of a social and religious reaction. Solomon had moved too rapidly in new directions. Their dislike of city life, and of the splendour and costliness of Solomon's Court, was emphasised by the cry of the tribes, when their demands for justice were rejected: "*To your tents, O Israel!*" "*So Israel departed to their tents.*"

The leader of a reactionary movement has often to go further than he intended. It was probably so with Jeroboam. The standard of religion which he set up in Northern Israel was not that of the time of David, but of

the earlier judges. Bethel and Dan were sacred places. Bethel was consecrated by the recollection of Jacob's vision. At Dan, as we have seen, there was an organised sanctuary, with priests, ephod, and teraphim. At each place Jeroboam erected a golden bull as an image of Yahweh. But no attempt was made to centralise religion. Shiloh, Gilgal, and other places had their sanctuaries. Although the unnamed prophet from Judah, and Ahijah, in later life, denounced this bull-worship, yet it is quite evident that the mass of the people saw nothing incongruous in worshipping Yahweh under the form of a young bull. The bull had been sacred to Ea in old days in Babylonia, and it was still for the Israelites the recognised representation of Him who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt. "The sin of Jeroboam," as the historian of a later day had learned to consider it, met with the approval of the majority of the worshippers of Yahweh. The history in the book of Kings, is written from the standpoint of the Deuteronomist three hundred years later. No special sanctity at this time attached itself to Jerusalem. In fact,

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Jerusalem was the innovation. Bethel was the place of a thousand memories.

In this way and for these reasons the schism originated by which Northern Israel was separated from Judah. Having such an origin, the taint of reaction always clung to its religion. If we except certain graphic narratives in the Hexateuch, the world owes little to the northern kingdom. Prior to the advent of Assyria, two crises in its history alone demand the attention of the student of religion.

The first of these is the final struggle between Yahweh and Baal, which has its centre in the reign of Ahab. As the son of Omri, Ahab inherited the warlike traditions and the prowess of his father, and was undoubtedly also a clever politician. His marriage with Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, King of Tyre, was a political event of the first importance. The northern kingdom had for years been engaged in a desperate and unequal struggle against Syria. The alliance with Phœnicia, resuming the friendly relations which had existed between Solomon and Hiram, gave to Israel the assistance which was required. But an alliance between two

Semitic nations was always supposed to imply a friendship between their gods. Solomon had permitted the daughter of Pharaoh to practise the rites of her own religion in Jerusalem. In the same way, on Jezebel's arrival at Samaria, a temple, altar, and Asherah were erected in honour of Melkarth, the Baal of Tyre, with the usual number of male and female attendants, while the sensuality which was part of the worship formed a natural consequent.

It is not easy to form a clear and just idea of the attitude of Ahab to Yahweh. His children, Ahaziah, Joram, and Athaliah, bear names compounded with that of the God of Israel. Probably Ahab's attitude was not always the same, but, as Jezebel increased in power and daring, so the loyalty of the King to Yahweh proportionately declined. For the character of Jezebel is the key to the situation. The Egyptian wife of Solomon had not tried to make converts in Jerusalem, but Jezebel was a very different woman. Strong-minded in the extreme, like Mary, Queen of England, she was a fanatic in her own faith. From the first, as the champion of Baal, she prepared

herself to extirpate the religion of Yahweh. The temper of Northern Israel was also in her favour. The people were familiar with Baal-worship, and some of its rites had for centuries been practised side by side with those of Yahweh. The temptation to adopt the religion of a great allied nation was apparently too strong to be resisted.

In this emergency Elijah appeared as the champion of Yahweh. A prophet from the wilderness, filled with what he called "jealousy for Yahweh God of Hosts," always conscious of standing in the Presence of God, he braved the wrath of Queen and Court. He had a simple message. He knew nothing of a Deuteronomic law condemning local altars. Gilgal, Bethel, Carmel, all the old religious sites were dear to him. "Yahweh He is God"—that was his message. Yahweh will brook no rivals to His claims.

It must be remembered that in Ahab and Elijah we have an instance of two men regarding the same events from totally different standpoints. To Ahab, political necessities appeared overpowering. Elijah was in his opinion a dangerous and mischievous fanatic,

who was ready to wreck the kingdom for the sake of certain religious opinions. To Elijah, Ahab was simply a traitor to God. To him religion was more important than statecraft. And Elijah was right. It was only with the destruction of the state that the religion of Yahweh became fitted to become a universal faith.

It cannot be said that the strong measures adopted by Elijah at Carmel had a lasting effect upon the nation. It is probably true that his best work was his unrecorded work. The lesson of "the still small voice" was not lost upon the fiery enthusiast. He did not again attempt to suppress Ahab's idolatry by force. He no longer lived a solitary life, but mixed with "the sons of the prophets" at Gilgal, Bethel, Jericho, and elsewhere. When the day of his departure came he was their friend and master. He impressed them with his personality. He imbued them with his spirit. His aims became their aims, and he left behind him not Elisha only, but numbers of men well trained to carry on his work.

Once again Elijah came into conflict with Ahab. The King had built for himself in

Jezreel a palace adorned with woodwork, and inlaid with ivory. Round this he desired suitable pleasure-grounds, and endeavoured to acquire by purchase or exchange the vineyard of Naboth, one of the inhabitants of the place. Naboth refused to part with this piece of family property, and was accordingly murdered at the instigation of Jezebel. This crime appears to have awakened the people at last, and when the prophet denounced the King, he had the nation at his back. Men saw that Baal-worship was not merely a question of the name of a god, but that it involved crime, injustice, and a disregard of human rights, while the religion of Yahweh meant righteousness and liberty.

We may sum up the lifework of Elijah by saying that, while Jehu was a bloody and unscrupulous man, and Hazael a fierce king, the terror of Israel, yet from the reign of Jehu Yahweh was the god of Northern Israel, and there was no question afterwards of rivalry between Him and Baal. Yet it was a savage and terrible victory. The worship of Baal and the house of Omri ended together in torrents of blood. Only a century passes, and,

with a clearer knowledge of the character of God, Hosea writes, "Yet a little while, and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause the kingdom of the house of Israel to cease."¹

¹ Hos. i. 4.

CHAPTER IX

AMOS AND HOSEA

JEHU ascended the throne about the year 843 B.C. For forty years the northern kingdom was never free from the horrors of war. Deprived of the alliance with Phœnicia, Israel became an easy prey to Syria. The words of Elisha to Hazael represent actual facts: "I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel: their strongholds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash in pieces their little ones, and rip up their women with child."¹ The first gleam of success came in the reign of Jehoash, who succeeded in defeating the Syrians. But the real cause of the unprecedented prosperity of the reign of Jeroboam II. (782—743) is to be found in the fact that repeated attacks from the great empire of Assyria had reduced the

¹ 11 Kings viii. 12.

Syrians to impotence, while subsequent internal events prevented the conquerors from advancing against Israel. The result was that Jeroboam was able to recover the old limits of the Davidic kingdom, "from the entering in of Hamath unto the sea of the Arabah." Everywhere there arose signs of the greatest material prosperity. Another change had passed over the life of Israel. Originally shepherd tribes, after the settlement in Canaan they had adopted an agricultural life. This was now changed. Trade and commerce, cities and city life, great palaces built by the wealthy, civilisation and literature, splendid sanctuaries to Yahweh, festivals and pilgrimages in His honour—these were some of the outward aspects of the reign of Jeroboam II. Yahweh alone was worshipped. It was He who had overthrown their enemies. Who was so great a god as their God? In the homes of the prophets the history of the nation was being compiled. The great stories of the past were given literary shape. The northern history, which forms one basis of the Hexateuch, was completed.

But what of righteousness? The majority

of the prophets never thought of it. They had become mere professionals. It was enough for them that Yahweh was the acknowledged God of Israel, and that a splendid ceremonial was practised at the sanctuaries. But there were those among the prophets who knew that it was not well with the nation. Micaiah was only an instance of others in Israel. These men saw that it was not enough to worship Yahweh, and Yahweh only. Everything depended upon *how* He was worshipped. Tithe and sacrifice were as nothing compared with doing justice and loving mercy. The study of the records of Israel, the teaching of the Mosaic basis of their religion, the judgments of the past, had shown them that Yahweh was a God of righteousness, that He looked upon the hearts of men, and that He demanded an outward purity of life, and an inner purity of thought.

Yet, strange to say, the leader of the new prophetic movement was not a prophet, nor "a prophet's son." Amos was a herdsman from the lonely wilderness or pasture-land of Tekoa, twelve miles south of Jerusalem. On three sides it is surrounded by desolate

limestone hills. Eastward, for about eighteen miles, it slopes downwards to the barren range of Jeshimon, through which a glimpse of the Dead Sea may be obtained. One can picture Amos taking his yearly journeys to sell his wool in the different markets of Northern Israel, and then returning to his lonely life to ponder upon what he had seen.

First, then, we ask, What was the social condition of Northern Israel, as the prophet describes it? The people themselves saw in their newly-won prosperity 'a proof of the favour of Yahweh. In opposition to prevalent views, Amos puts his finger on the evils that must necessarily destroy the life of the nation. Wealth had become all-powerful, and therefore unscrupulous greed, dishonest trading, and disregard of the rights of the poor, were universal. The gulf between rich and poor was daily becoming wider. Even justice was denied to the pauper. Magistrates and priests alike took bribes and perverted judgment. In the very sanctuaries of Yahweh there dwelt injustice, and robbery, and fraud. Listen to some of his descriptions. Judgment must fall on Israel, because "they sell an honest

man for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes ; they trample to the dust the head of the poor, and turn aside the way of the meek.”¹

And again : “ Forasmuch, therefore, as ye trample upon the poor, and take exactions from him of wheat ; ye have built houses of hewn stone, but ye shall not dwell in them ; ye have planted pleasant vineyards, but ye shall not drink the wine thereof.”² The rich had their winter houses and their summer houses, adorned with ivory, with silken cushions on their couches. The poor had not a roof to shelter them.

Amid this widespread corruption of life the women were more culpable than their husbands. Upon them Amos pours the full measure of his scorn : “ Hear this word, ye kine of Bashan, that are in the mountain of Samaria, which oppress the poor, which crush the needy, which say unto their lords, ‘ Bring, and let us drink.’ Sworn hath the Lord Yahweh by His holiness, lo ! days are coming when there shall be a taking away of you with hooks, and the last of you with fish-hooks. Yea, by the breaches (in the wall of

¹ Amos ii. 6, 7

² Amos v. 11.

the captured city) shall ye go out every one headlong." It is a herdsman's rough picture—a herd of kine heedless and greedy; but it was spoken of the matrons of Samaria.

We have now to ask, What was the religious condition of the nation? As we have seen, the old struggle between Yahweh and Baal was over. The people were undivided in their allegiance to the national God. But it was really only a matter of names, for the ritual was much the same in either case. Yahweh was worshipped under the form of a bull. The use of ephod and teraphim was universal. The old Semitic sacred pillars and the Asherahs were found at every religious centre. At the prescribed festivals, at the Sabbaths and new moons, the sanctuaries were thronged with worshippers, but were scenes of drunkenness and sensuality. Divine worship was "a riot of sin." All the immoralities of Baal had been introduced into the worship of Yahweh. The name was Yahweh's name, but the ritual was the ritual of Baal.

From this degrading picture we turn to the prophet, and to his idea of God.

The people of Israel believed Yahweh to be

more powerful than all gods, but He was their peculiar property. Not so Amos. He takes in order the nations round Palestine—Syria, Philistia, Phœnicia, Moab, and Ammon — and proclaims against them the judgment of Yahweh, because they had broken the moral laws of God, the universal laws of fidelity, kinship, and humanity. Yahweh brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, but He also brought the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Syrians from Kir. For the first time Yahweh is described as the Almighty Ruler of the nations of the world.

Yahweh, too, is the Creator of heaven and earth. Some critics refuse to accept as the work of Amos the great doxologies which celebrate Yahweh in this character, but they are at any rate in complete accord with the thought of the prophet.

“Seek Him that maketh the Pleiades and Orion, and turneth the shadow of deep darkness into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night; that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth; Yahweh is His name.”¹

¹ Amos v. 8.

Or again: "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel. For, lo! He that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what is His thought, and maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth; Yahweh, the God of hosts, is His name."¹

What then, according to Amos, does the Creator of heaven and earth, the ruler of the nations, demand from men? Righteousness and justice, truth and pity. These are first, and above all. God is righteous, Israel is unrighteous, therefore Israel must be destroyed. The people were longing for "the day of Yahweh." It was to bring final conquest over their enemies, and perfect prosperity at home. The day of Yahweh, cries the prophet, what can it mean for an ungodly nation but darkness and not light? But they would not listen to him. Amaziah drove him from Bethel. And so he wrote his message in a book, that his words might be read by men for ever.

Men ask, What is inspiration? The Church has never formulated a definition of the inspiration of Holy Scripture. But if you ask,

¹ Amos iv. 13.

Where is inspiration? we can point you to a herdsman prophet, coming forth from the lonely wilderness, the fire burning within him, to proclaim the eternal principles of the righteousness of God. Eternal! They are as true to-day, they are as applicable to-day, as they were nearly three thousand years ago, when Amos spoke or wrote; and therefore the shepherd of Tekoa takes his place among the greatest of God's great men. For still it is true that neither ritual, nor sacrifice, nor ceremonial, neither tithe, nor offering, can atone for fraud, and injustice, and cruelty, for drunkenness, and sensuality, and disregard of the rights of the poor. Still the message of God's prophets is:

Let righteousness roll down like rivers,
And judgment like a mighty stream.

If a man desires to realise the grandeur of Greek tragedy, he must read Æschylus, he must read Sophocles, but he must by no means forget Euripides, the human. Similarly, if a man wishes to understand the greatness of the Hebrew prophets, he must read Amos and Isaiah of Jerusalem, but he must not omit Hosea of the sad life and human heart.

With the death of Jeroboam II. the period of outward prosperity for Israel came to an end. Assyria, under the powerful monarch Tiglath-pileser III., again became active in Western Asia. On the other hand, anarchy reigned in Northern Israel. Jeroboam II. had died in the year 743 B.C. His son Zechariah was slain by Shallum after a reign of six months. One month later Shallum was killed by Menahem, who sought the support of Assyria "to confirm the kingdom in his hand." Menahem reigned for four years, and was succeeded by his son Pekahiah. Two years later this monarch was slain by Pekah, who seized the throne in the year 735 B.C. A year later a conspiracy was formed against him by Hosea, who ascended the throne as the vassal of Assyria. Thus in the decade following the death of Jeroboam II. there were six occupants of the throne of Israel, of whom five died violent deaths. No wonder Hosea wrote :

As for Samaria, her king is cut off
As foam upon the water.¹

Amos and Hosea were both prophets of

¹ Hos. x. 7,

doom, but with a difference. Amos, stern and ascetic, the simple-minded dweller in the wilderness, saw only the penalty that must follow on violated law. There is no background of mercy to the picture that he paints; scarcely a ray to lighten the darkness. His message is impersonal. He is an outsider to the life of the people upon whom judgment is about to fall. But Hosea is one of themselves. The iron has entered into his own soul. He loves his native land. He knows its produce—the corn, and the wine, and the oil. He has delighted in the blossoms of the lilies of the field, and in the beauty of the olive-tree. He has smelled, and remembers, the scent of Lebanon. He knows the way of the beasts of the field, and of the birds of the air, and of the creeping things of the ground. It is a beautiful world created by a good God. But he knows the life of the people also: the idolatry, the absence of “truth, and mercy, and the knowledge of God.” Swearing, lying, killing, stealing, and adultery are still universal. Deeds of violence follow so closely on one another that “blood touches blood.” The priests are as the people.

They are the brigands who attack the pilgrims on their way to the sanctuaries, and share in all the sins of the land. King and princes are drunk perpetually. The people have never been faithful to Yahweh. In order to obtain fruitful harvests they turned their backs upon Him who gave them the land, and worshipped the Baals, the agricultural gods of the people they were bidden to dispossess. Even now, when they profess to worship Yahweh, they do so with the worship of the Baals, and neglect absolutely the moral laws of God. Punishment must follow, but in the punishment, and beyond it, Hosea sees also the mercy and the love of God.

In estimating the message of Hosea we cannot overlook the personal element which is present in it. How are we to interpret the first and third chapters of his book?

Many of the older commentators took the story quite literally. They saw no difficulty in believing that God told the prophet to take to himself a wife whose previous life had been evil. Of that union there were three children—Jezreel, Lo-ruhamah, and Lo-ammi. But Gomer never ceased from

her evil ways, and the lesson to the prophet was that, as his wife was untrue to him, so was Israel unfaithful to Yahweh. But the moral difficulty of this is too great, and further, the analogy would be defective, inasmuch as, according to Hosea, Israel had not at the beginning been false to God.

Accordingly, following Professor Robertson Smith, nearly all modern commentators interpret the story in a different way. When Hosea married Gomer, daughter of Diblaim, he looked forward to a happy life. He was not a prophet then ; he was only a good man who thought deeply on religious questions. When his first son was born he called him Jezreel, because he felt that God could not approve of the cruelties perpetrated by Jehu, when he seized the throne. "Call his name Jezreel : for yet a little while, and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause the kingdom of Israel to cease."¹ This marks a great moral advance. At the time, Jehu had been welcomed as the champion of Yahweh. Then a second child was born, a daughter. But Hosea had begun to suspect

¹ Hos. i. 4.

his wife's faithfulness, and he called her Lo-ruhamah, "unloved" or "unpitied." Lastly, a son was born, and the prophet, having no doubt as to the falseness of Gomer, called his name Lo-ammi, "not my kin," or "not my people." Finally his wife left him. Apparently she sank into slavery. God told the prophet to take her back, and keep and love her, "even as Yahweh loveth the children of Israel, though they turn unto other gods, and love cakes of raisins."¹ So he bought her back to him for fifteen pieces of silver, and an homer of barley, and an half-homer of barley, and gave up his life to reclaim her from her evil ways. Afterwards, as he pondered on his ruined life and his loveless home, he began to see that it was a parable of the relations between God and Israel. Yahweh had chosen a people, and that people had been false to Him. So the prophet speaks of Israel as the unfaithful wife of Yahweh. She had left Him for the worship of Baalim. She said, "I will go after my lovers"²—the agricultural gods of the Canaanites—"that give me my bread and water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and

¹ Hos. iii. 1.² Hos. ii. 5, 8.

my drink. For she did know not that I gave her the corn, and the wine, and the oil, and multiplied unto her silver and gold, which they made into the image of Baal." Therefore the consequences of her sin will come upon her, and she will be driven out into the wilderness, until she learns the meaning of her marriage vow to Yahweh.

Such is the explanation which apparently holds the field at present. But it is not devoid of difficulty. For myself, I rather incline to the view which takes the whole story as a parable or allegory. The description of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel as that of husband and wife is not peculiar to Hosea. Indeed, as a critic who rejects the theory of parable admits: "It was common to nearly all Semitic religions to express the union of a god with his land or with his people by the figure of marriage." It is argued by supporters of the literal interpretation that, had Hosea's wife been a good woman, he would not have shamed her by writing as he did. This has little force. If his hearers understood that he spake in parables, they would never have given a thought either to him or

his wife, but would have attended only to the moral of his tale. In fact, the better his wife was known to be the less likely they would have been to connect the prophet's words with her. But we cannot argue from what we do not know. Hosea may not have been married at all. We Westerns are so excessively literal. Eastern peoples delight in parables. Professor Davidson, while not deciding on the question, is of opinion that the names of the children make neither for nor against the allegorical interpretation. He considers that they have no more necessary connection with the domestic history of the prophet than had the names of Shear-Jashub, and Maher-shalal-hashbaz, with the home life of Isaiah. After all, it is largely a question of personal feeling as to the fitness of things.

Throughout all Hosea's preaching there are three main ideas—punishment, repentance, forgiveness. But God's punishment of His people is not so much retributive as curative. In the day of the nation's exile in the wilderness Yahweh will woo her again.¹ He will speak to her heart, and she shall no more call Him

¹ Hos. ii. 14.

“my Baal,” but “my husband.” Then God will again betroth her unto Him in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies. He will have pity on “the unpitied.” He will say to Lo-ammi, “thou art My people,” and they will say “my God.” And when this shall be realised, hear the word of Yahweh: “I will heal their backslidings, I will love them freely: for Mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall blossom as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive-tree, and his smell as Lebanon.”¹ But still, forgiven Israel must remember that Yahweh is a God of justice; for “the ways of Yahweh are right, and the just shall walk in them; but transgressors shall fall therein.”²

¹ Hos xiv. 4.

² Hos. xiv. 9.

CHAPTER X

ISAIAH OF JERUSALEM

WE must now turn to Judah. The fate of the northern kingdom can best be understood in considering the history of the southern.

The division of the kingdom in the reign of Rehoboam took place in the year 930 B.C. For two centuries we hear little of Judah. Her territory was small, and, indeed, historical interest centres altogether in the city of Jerusalem. During the greater part of this period the southern kingdom enjoyed the blessing of peace which was so essential to its existence. Northern Israel acted as a buffer state between Judah and Syria. On the south Egypt remained in a condition of quiescence. Unlike Northern Israel, Judah suffered from no internal revolts or changes of dynasty. The attempt made by Athaliah, wife of Jehoram and daughter of Ahab, to establish in Jerusalem

the worship of the Tyrian Melkarth, was finally defeated by the strategy of Jehoiada, the high priest. Worship was, however, still carried on at the local high places, and there was little change in religious practices from those customary in the early years of the monarchy.

The causes which contributed to the prosperity of the northern kingdom during the reign of Jeroboam II. extended to Judah. Uzziah in Jerusalem may be taken as the contemporary of Jeroboam II. Amid much that is uncertain, it may be accepted that Uzziah fortified the city of Jerusalem, increased the army, extended his influence over the territory of the Philistines, encouraged commerce, and regained possession of the important harbour of Elath on the Gulf of Akabah.

What has been said of the social and religious condition of Northern Israel, consequent upon this new era of prosperity, may be taken to apply to Judah also. Micah, the village prophet from the Shephelah, corresponds very closely to Amos, the herdsman of Tekoa. The increase of wealth, resulting mainly from trade, had produced a millionaire class who desired country estates. The small yeomen

were dispossessed by the plutocrats. On them Micah denounces woe :

Woe to them that plan mischief,
And on their beds work out evil !
As morning breaks they put it into execution,
For it lies to the power of their hands !
They covet fields and seize them,
Houses and lift them up.
So they crush a good man and his home,
A man and his heritage !¹

In Judah the tyranny of wealth was aided by the corruption of the judges. There were prophets also who prophesied falsely, and for the sake of reward supported the rich in their acts of violence ; who forgot that the essence of true religion, that which Yahweh requires of every man, is "to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with his God."²

Isaiah, the aristocrat, gives a similar picture to that of Micah, the peasant. "Woe unto them," he cries, "that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no room for the poor people!"³

The editor's note at the commencement of the book of Isaiah tells us that the prophet exercised his mission in the reigns of Uzziah,

¹ Mic. ii. 1.

² Mic. vi. 8.

³ Isa. v. 8.

Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. We may dismiss the reign of Uzziah, as the prophet only received his call in the year in which that monarch died. Jotham, his successor, reigned for only four years, and nothing of importance took place during this period (740—736 B.C.). The work of Isaiah belongs to the stormy years included in the reigns of Ahaz and Hezekiah.

Let us try to form a picture of the part of the world concerned. On the north and east of Palestine lay the empires of Syria and Assyria. On the south-west was Egypt. Thus the little kingdom of Palestine lay between the great empires of the time. When Egypt and Assyria were at war, Palestine always suffered. Hence we find constant vacillation. At one time siding with Assyria, at another with Egypt, Israel was ground to nothingness. Isaiah alone had a definite policy, —the policy of no alliances.

While Isaiah throughout all his ministry was engaged in practical politics, we have to remember that with him politics were never divorced from religion. It was as the prophet of Yahweh that he endeavoured to guide the

national councils. The memory of his call was always with him. He never forgot the day when, worshipping in the Temple at Jerusalem, the earthly temple had seemed to him to pass into the heavenly. The Holy Place become in truth the dwelling-place of God. He beheld Yahweh high and lifted up, and the seraphim around the throne, while on his ear fell the Trisagion of Eternity :

Holy, holy, holy, is Yahweh Sabaoth,
The whole earth is full of His glory.¹

The very foundations of the Temple seemed to tremble at the advent of God. "Woe is me!" he cried. "I am undone! I am a man of unclean lips! I dwell among a people of unclean lips! Mine eyes have seen the King, Yahweh Sabaoth!" Then it seemed to him that one of the seraphim took a hot stone from off the altar, and flew to him, and with it touched his lips, and said: "Lo, this has touched thy lips, and thy iniquity is gone, and thy sin forgiven." Then he heard the voice of Yahweh saying: "Whom shall I send? and who will go for us?" And he

¹ Isa. vi. 3.

answered : " Here am I, send me." And He said : " Go, and say to this people :

Hear on, but understand not ! See on, but perceive not !
Make fat this people's heart, make dull their ears, and
besmear their eyes,

Lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears,
and their heart understand, and their health be re-
stored."

It was a sad and bewildering message for the prophet to have to bring.

The revived activity of Assyria was at this time causing widespread consternation throughout Western Asia. Tiglath-pileser III. had inaugurated a new policy as regards the conquered states. The payment of a tribute to Assyria was no longer sufficient. The native kings were dispossessed, and Assyrian governors appointed in their stead. But this was not all. The Assyrian king, in order to preclude the possibility of revolt, formed a great scheme of deportation. The conquered peoples were removed from their own lands, and scattered throughout the cities and provinces of the empire. Henceforward conquest involved the loss of nationality.

It is not surprising, therefore, to find that,

about the year 735 B.C., Pekah, King of Northern Israel, attempted to form a league to oppose Assyria. He entered into an alliance with Rezin, King of Damascus. Ahaz of Judah refused to join. Syria and Israel then prepared to invade the southern kingdom. Ahaz and the inhabitants of Jerusalem were terror-stricken. As Isaiah puts it, "their hearts were moved as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind."¹ In despair Ahaz resolved to appeal to Assyria for help. Isaiah protested in vain. Meeting with Ahaz, he gave him this message from Yahweh :

Take heed and be quiet,
 Fear not, neither let thy heart be faint
 Because of these two tails of smoking firebrands,
 For the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria,
 And of the son of Remaliah.²

Why did Isaiah adopt this course? Rezin and Pekah could devastate Judah. They might even starve out Jerusalem itself. In making his decision the prophet was influenced alike by his faith in God and by his keen political insight. Yahweh would preserve His own city. That was always a cardinal prin-

¹ Isa. vii. 2.

² Isa. vii. 4.

ciple with Isaiah. On the other hand he saw that Syria and Northern Israel were doomed. He had realised the might of Assyria. Apart from all other considerations, the mere fact that these two nations had rebelled against Tiglath-pileser must eventuate in their destruction. Therefore he bid Ahaz be of good courage and wait. To make his meaning perfectly clear, he also gave the King a sign. A child would be born during the coming year, who would be called Immanuel, "God with us!" Here the prophet's faith in Yahweh appears. But, before that boy was old enough to know the difference between good and evil, Syria and Northern Israel would be depopulated, and their kings given to the sword. Here we have proof of the prophet's political insight. His message therefore at this time was, "Keep clear of international politics, for Yahweh will preserve His own."

Ahaz, in his terror, refused to listen to the prophet. Naturally a weak man, he completely lost his head. Yet, apparently, he sought to win the favour of Yahweh by a terrible action, *viz.* the sacrifice of one of his sons. In an earlier chapter of the

second book of Kings we read that, when Judah and Israel had discomfited Mesha, King of Moab, and were besieging his city, he took his eldest son, and offered him upon the city wall as a burnt offering to Chemosh, god of Moab.¹ This action seems to have had a great effect upon the besieging army, for the historian goes on to say: "And then came great wrath upon Israel: and they departed from him, and returned to their own land." This dreadful deed was imitated by Ahaz, "according to the abominations of the heathen."²

Ahaz then sent messengers to the King of Assyria, saying, "I am thy servant, and thy son; come up, and save me out of the hand of the King of Syria, and out of the hand of the King of Israel, which rise up against me."³ But, in accordance with the ideas of the time, the protection thus asked for must be purchased at a great price. Ambassadors must not come with empty hands. So the King took all the silver and gold which was found in the house of Yahweh, and also in his own treasury, and sent it to Tiglath-

¹ II Kings iii. 27. ² II Kings xvi. 3. ³ II Kings xvi. 7

pileser. Ahaz might call it a present, but he knew, and his ambassadors knew, that it was really the beginning of tribute, and therefore involved the surrender of the independence of Judah. Assyria naturally accepted the invitation, attacked Syria, swept over the country—as Isaiah puts it, “shaved it as with a razor”¹—and finally captured Damascus. In accordance with the new policy of Assyria, this conquest involved the deportation of the inhabitants of the city, who were removed to Kir, which seems to have been a pastoral district in the south-east of Assyria. Thus was Judah delivered from the armies of Syria. But the question meets us, who then was right, the King or the prophet? Undoubtedly the prophet. What Assyria did at the request of Ahaz, she would have been compelled to do in self-defence. The coalition between Syria and Northern Israel was directed against Assyria. Ahaz therefore paid Tiglath-pileser for doing what he would have done at any rate. By the action of her king Judah lost her independence.

After the capture of Damascus, Tiglath-

¹ Isa. vii. 20.

piles^{er} summoned Ahaz thither to do him homage. We have no details of the interview, but Ahaz was so anxious to please the conqueror that he introduced certain features of Assyrian religion into the Temple at Jerusalem. He sent to Urijah, the priest, a description of an altar which he had seen in Damascus, and directed him to have a similar one erected in the Temple. Again, at a later time, we read that King Josiah "destroyed the altars that were on the roof of the upper chamber of Ahaz."¹ But altars on the roof imply the worship of the sun, moon, and stars. Ahaz, therefore, to please Assyria, introduced the worship of "the host of heaven" into the sanctuary of Yahweh, God of Israel.

But while Ahaz refused to follow the counsel of the prophet, and showed a complete incapacity of appreciating the seriousness of the situation, there were some who saw the wisdom of Isaiah's policy, and grasped his idea of the government of Yahweh. The prophet and his disciples believed that a day was coming when God would vindicate Himself and them. So they formed themselves into a little society,

¹ 11 Kings xxiii. 12.

and awaited events. A very notable action upon their part! Let me quote the words of Professor Robertson Smith to explain what I mean. "The formation of this little community was a new thing in the history of religion. Till then no one had dreamed of a fellowship of faith dissociated from all national forms, maintained without the exercise of ritual services, bound together by faith in the divine word alone. It was the birth of a new era in the Old Testament religion, for it was the birth of the conception of the *Church*, the first step in the emancipation of spiritual religion from the forms of political life—a step not less significant that its consequences were not seen until centuries had passed away. The community of true religion and the political community of Israel had never before been separated even in thought; now they stood side by side, conscious of their mutual antagonism, and never again fully to fall back into their old identity."

Damascus had fallen in the year 733 B.C. In the course of the campaign the Assyrians had ravaged the outlying portions of the kingdom of Israel, and some of the inhabitants

had been transferred to Assyria. Pekah, the King, was slain, and Hoshea was placed on the throne as the vassal of Assyria. Some five years later Tiglath-pileser died, and was succeeded by Shalmaneser IV. No Assyrian records of this monarch's reign have been discovered. Biblical writers tell us that he led an expedition against Israel, because Hoshea did not pay the tribute, and was conspiring with So, King of Egypt. We can easily understand why the tribute was not sent. It was impossible to raise it in a ravaged and depopulated country. So, King of Egypt, is probably to be identified with Sabako, who, starting from Ethiopia, had brought all Egypt under his sway. His success may have prompted Hoshea to look to him for aid amid his difficulties with the Assyrian king. To this period is naturally assigned the following prophecy of Isaiah :

Woe ! the proud coronet of the drunkards of Ephraim,
 And the fading flower of her beauteous adornment
 Which crown the rich valley of those who with wine are
 down-smitten !
 Behold Yahweh, has in readiness one who is strong and
 unflinching,
 Like a storm of hail, a destroying tempest ;

Like a storm of mighty, overflowing waters
He casts down to the earth with violence.
With feet shall they be trampled upon—
The proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim,
And the fading flower of her beauteous adornment
Which crown the rich valley ;
And it will be like an early fig before the fruit-season,
Which as soon as a man sees in his hand, he swallows.¹

Shalmaneser at once invaded Palestine, and laid siege to Samaria, but died or was murdered before the city was taken. The crown was seized by Sargon, who became one of the most famous of the kings of Assyria. Samaria was taken in the year 722 B.C., and in the inscriptions of Sargon we read :

“ The city of Samaria I besieged, I captured ; 27,280 of its inhabitants I carried away ; fifty chariots in the midst of them I collected, and the rest of their goods I seized ; I set my governor over them and laid upon them the tribute of the former king.”

It is quite clear that the figure mentioned by Sargon will not account for the whole population of the land. In it is included probably the most powerful and the most

¹ Isa. xxviii. 1.

dangerous of the inhabitants from the Assyrian point of view. These unfortunate captives were settled in the Assyrian province of Gozan, or scattered through the mountainous districts of Media. The remainder of the population was permitted to remain in the land of Israel, and settlers from the east were afterwards incorporated with them. The idea therefore of the ten tribes existing somewhere as a unity is devoid of all historical foundation. The policy of Assyria in regard to conquered kingdoms was to destroy their nationality. Taken away at different times, and scattered in small groups over an immense territory, the captives from Northern Israel became incorporated with the native inhabitants, who in most cases were of kindred race.

The chronology of the Old Testament in regard to the reign of Hezekiah is difficult of explanation. It seems most probable that the new king ascended the throne about the year 720 B.C. Under the influence of Isaiah he began to institute certain religious reforms. For the first time an effort was made to centralise worship in Jerusalem by an

attempted destruction of the high places or local shrines, which, from their connection with heathenism, had proved so injurious to the religion of Israel. The sacred pillars and Asherahs were also swept away. This reformation was evidently of a partial character, but it paved the way for the great changes in the reign of Josiah.

The people also began to grow discontented under the yoke of Assyria, and a nationalist party was formed in Judah to co-operate with the King of Egypt. Isaiah had, for the moment, sufficient influence with Hezekiah to prevent an actual breach with Assyria. But the existence of this spirit was bound to complicate the political situation, and as Dr. Driver puts it, "Egypt was at this time the evil genius of the people of Palestine." The language of Isaiah in this national crisis was very plain and direct. Take for example the following :

Woe to the unruly sons ! says Yahweh,
Carrying out a purpose which is not Mine.
And concluding a treaty contrary to My spirit,
Thus adding sin to sin.
Who set forth on the way to Egypt, without asking My
counsel,

To flee to the shelter of Pharaoh, and to seek protection in the shadow of Egypt.

The shelter will turn to your shame, and the refuge to your confusion.

For though his vassals, the princes, are in Zoan, and his messengers go as far as Hanes,

None wins aught but disappointment from a people which can avail nothing,

From a people which brings no help, but disappointment and also disgrace.¹

But the protest of Isaiah was unavailing. Popular feeling was too strong for him. A series of revolts against Assyria in Southern Babylonia encouraged the western malcontents, and finally Hezekiah, yielding to the persistency of the Egyptian party, withheld the tribute due to Assyria.

How are we to understand the policy of the prophet? He had opposed any alliance with Assyria; now with even greater earnestness he resisted any attempt at rebellion. But circumstances alter cases. The leading idea of Isaiah, the statesman, was to keep clear of all foreign politics. The duty laid upon Judah was to develop her religious life. This she must do from within herself. But this was only possible if she avoided all connection

¹ Isa. xxx. 1.

with the great empires round her. Ahaz, however, had in the first instance rejected the prophet's counsel, and had formed an alliance with Assyria. That alliance, once made, could not be broken without the certainty of war, and of ultimate destruction. And this is what actually happened.

The Assyrian army advanced through Syria into Judæa on its way to Egypt. Hezekiah in terror proposed terms of peace, and at great cost thought he had obtained it. He gave to Sennacherib all the silver that was in the House of Yahweh and in the king's house, and he stripped the gold from off the pillars of the Temple in his desire to appease the Assyrian king. The account given by Sennacherib is virtually the same. We read:

"As for Hezekiah of Judah, who had not submitted to my yoke, forty-six of his strong cities, together with innumerable fortresses and small towns which depended on them, by overthrowing the walls and open attack, by battle engines and battering-rams, I besieged, I captured. I brought out from the midst of them and counted as a spoil 200,150 persons, great and small, male and female,

horses, mules, asses, camels, oxen and sheep without number. Hezekiah himself I shut up like a bird in a cage at Jerusalem, his royal city."

Lower down we have the amount of the fine paid by the king: "Thirty talents of gold, 800 talents of pure silver, carbuncles and other precious stones, a couch of ivory, thrones of ivory, an elephant's hide, an elephant's tusk, rare woods of various names, and his daughters, the women of his palace, male singers and female singers."

The object of these records was the glorification of the Assyrian king, and naturally they contain no account of any reverses.

The further progress of events is not quite clear, but apparently Sennacherib passed on as far as Lachish on his way to Egypt. Feeling however that a fortified city in his rear might possibly prove a danger, he sent back certain principal officers of his army to demand the surrender of Jerusalem.

Isaiah compelled the King to withstand this demand. The people of Jerusalem were simply a disorganised and helpless mob, but one man with a courageous heart and a firm

faith in God was able to bend them to his will. Jerusalem is the city of Yahweh. Yahweh will preserve His own. Accordingly Isaiah gave this message to Hezekiah:

“Therefore thus saith Yahweh concerning the King of Assyria:

He shall not come into the city,
Nor shoot an arrow into it,
Nor come before it with a shield,
Nor cast up a mound against it.
I will guard this city that I may rescue it,
For my own sake, and for my servant David's sake.”¹

A sudden and unexplained catastrophe overtook the Assyrian army on the borders of Egypt. Possibly pestilence swept their ranks. We cannot tell. But at any rate, the fact remains that Sennacherib returned discomfited to his own land, and did not again lead an expedition against Palestine. Some years later he was assassinated by two of his sons.

¹ Isa. xxxvii. 33.

CHAPTER XI

THE SOCIAL LIFE OF JERUSALEM

IN the previous chapter I have briefly told the story of Isaiah's connection with foreign affairs, and described the policy which he advocated. I shall now endeavour to deal with the religious and social condition of the people amongst whom he lived. But first we must ask, What was the prophet's own idea of God?

To Isaiah Yahweh was the infinitely holy. We use the word "holy" in so many different senses that we sometimes misunderstand its signification. We speak of the Holy God, the Holy Bible, the Holy Church, and the the Holy Table. Thus the same word is used to express moral and spiritual excellence, and also the fact that things are consecrated or set apart. What, then, was the origin of the word? The root idea seems to be that of separation. In fact, in its primary significance

it corresponds very closely with the Polynesian word "taboo." Certain things cannot be touched without danger. The word had therefore originally no ethical connotation. The latter was of gradual growth.

We can thus see why Isaiah so frequently connects the words "high" and "holy." Yahweh is the high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy. How can men profane the Temple of such a god, when in His presence even the seraphim veil their faces and their feet? But He, the High and Holy, is opposed to all else that exalts itself. Therefore :

A day of doom has Yahweh Sabaoth for all that is proud
and lofty,

And for all that is lifted up and high.

The haughtiness of human kind shall be bowed down,

And the loftiness of man brought low,

And in that day shall Yahweh alone be exalted.¹

In the presence of this high and holy One Isaiah seemed to stand, and immediately an ethical relationship made itself felt. He was a man of unclean lips, and he dwelt in the midst of a people of unclean lips. The fire

¹ Isa. ii. 12, 17.

of God alone could burn away the impurity. What, then, to Isaiah, was sin in its essence? The essence of sin is the non-recognition and therefore the neglect of God. Human pride and arrogance, rioting and drunkenness, witchcraft, hatred and variance, all the manifold iniquities practised in the name of religion, these would disappear if only men would understand what God really is. And for these things Yahweh must punish. The King of Assyria may in one sense be His agent, but none the less, "when the Lord shall have finished all His work on Mount Sion and in Jerusalem, He will punish the fruit of the stoutness of heart of the King of Assyria, and the vainglory of the uplifting of his eyes. For he has said:—By the strength of my hand have I done it, and by my wisdom, for I have discernment."¹ If this is for Isaiah the root and essence of sin, then the consciousness of God, and the humility that naturally follows, is the essence of religion. Thus the attitude of the true worshippers of Yahweh could not be better described than in the words of the Benedicite: "Ye holy and humble

¹ Isa. x. 12.

men of heart, bless ye the Lord : praise Him and magnify Him for ever."

We notice also in Isaiah a great advance in the extent of Yahweh's jurisdiction. In this he is the successor of Amos. All the forces of the world are subject to Yahweh. As we have seen, the King of Assyria may exalt himself and reap the penalty ; yet still he is only the agent of Yahweh, working out His will. God's vengeance upon Judah for sin may be brought about by him, but there are limits beyond which he cannot go. The city of Yahweh shall be preserved. Jerusalem shall be inviolate. We shall see hereafter that the idea of the prophet as to the assured safety of Jerusalem brought about results which he little dreamed of.

Let us now try to get a picture of the state of Jerusalem in the days of Isaiah. The reign of Uzziah, like that of Jeroboam II. in the north, was distinctly a period of great prosperity. For the first time since the days of Solomon, Jerusalem was a wealthy place. If a man were rich, the city was a pleasant spot to dwell in. But the prophet regards its social life from God's standard. In one

of his earliest prophecies he deals with the religion of the people. Their so-called religion is simply rampant heathenism. They have forgotten Yahweh, and He, therefore, "has renounced them."

They are full of diviners from the East, and of sooth-sayers like the Philistines.

And with foreigners they strike hands in agreement.¹

They are rich, and idle, and godless :

Israel's land is become full of silver and gold—endless the sum of his treasures ;

His land is become full of horses—endless the number of his chariots.²

But there is worse :

His land is become full of idols ;

To the work of his own hand he bows down, to that which his own fingers have wrought.³

Between false gods and superstitions Israel has forgotten Yahweh, and He "cannot forgive them." What shall happen unto them?

But further, those who do not humble themselves before God are naturally haughty, arrogant, and unjust to their inferiors. They live for self, and for self only. This was

¹ Isa. ii. 6.

² Isa. ii. 7.

³ Isa. ii. 8.

especially true of the women of Jerusalem. No more scathing language than that of the prophet has ever been applied to rich and godless women, puffed up with vanity and revelling in indulgence. What hope could there be for the city when the mothers were such as these ?

“ And Yahweh said :

Because Zion's daughters are haughty,
And walk with neck thrown back and leering eyes,
Tripping as they go, and making a chime with their
ankles,
With scabs will the Lord encrust the crowns of their
heads, Yahweh will expose their shames.”¹

In that day Yahweh will put away the finery of the anklets, and the little suns and moons ; the ear-drops, the arm-chains, and the long veils ; the diadems, the step-chains, the girdles, the perfume-boxes, and the amulets ; the signet-rings and the nose-rings ; the rich dresses, the mantles, the shawls, and the purses ; the mirrors, the linen vests, the turbans, and the large veils.

Instead of perfume shall be rottenness, and instead of a girdle a rope ;

¹ Isa. iii. 16.

Instead of artful curls, baldness ; and instead of a flowing mantle, girding of sackcloth.

Finally the prophet breaks forth into the great six-fold woe. The first deals with the land question :

Woe unto those who join house to house, who add field to field, till there is no more room,
And ye are settled alone in the midst of the land.
Therefore hath Yahweh Sabaoth revealed Himself in mine ears :

Surely your many houses shall become a desolation ;
your great and fair places without inhabitant.
For ten acres of vineyard shall yield but one bath,
and the seed of an homer but an ephah.¹

Rich men, who had made money in business or otherwise, in their desire for country estates drove out the poor by force, or dispossessed them by the bribed injustice of the judges. In the judgment that will follow the land will be left waste and desolate. An acre of vineyard will not yield a gallon of wine, while at the grain harvest the crop will not equal a tenth part of the seed sown.

The second woe deals with the sin of drunkenness :

Woe unto those who rise at dawn to addict themselves to mead,

¹ Isa. v. 8.

Who tarry late in the evening, inflamed with wine ;
And lute and harp, timbrel and flute, and wine are at
their banquets.

But they regard not Yahweh's work, and they see not
the operation of His hands.

Therefore my people go into exile unawares,
And their honoured ones are sapless from hunger, and
their noisy throng parched with thirst.

Therefore Sheol gapes ravenously, and opens the mouth
to its widest ;

And the splendour of Zion, and her busy throng,
And all who are joyous within her plunge headlong
into it ;

And lambs graze and fatlings feed amid ruins.

Could any description be more graphic than this? Three sentences, and the whole tragedy passes before us. There is a scene of merriment and revelry. It is a very banquet of Damocles. Suddenly it is over. The grave has opened in front of the revellers. One last picture. A city in ruins, and lambs feeding where once men dwelt.

The third is the woe of the scoffers :

Woe unto those who draw guilt on themselves with
cords of ungodliness,

And punishment as with traces of a wain ;

Who say : Let His work hasten, let it speed, that we
may see it,

Let the purpose of Israel's Holy One draw nigh and
come, that we may perceive it !

These men will not believe in the approaching doom. They say, Where is the promise of His coming? We shall believe in it when we see it. And all the time their unbelief is like a trace harnessing them to their sin.

The fourth is the woe upon men of perverted minds :

Woe unto those who call evil good, and good evil ;
Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness ;
Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter !

In this case the moral judgment is so utterly perverted that they believe that whatever is is right. They see prosperity and success where Isaiah hears the cry of the poor. What they consider good, the prophet declares to be evil. Like our own poet, Isaiah believed that—

Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay.

The fifth is the woe of the self-confident :

Woe unto those that are wise in their own eyes
And keen-witted in their own conceit !

These are the men who, in the politics of the nation, leave out God. Yet "the fear of Yahweh is the beginning of knowledge."¹

¹ Prov. i. 7.

The sixth is the woe of the judges :

Woe unto those who are mighty—in drinking wine,
and valiant—in spicing mead ;

Who for a bribe declare the wicked righteous, and
strip the righteous of his righteousness.

They are mighty valiant men!—but it is
a valour derived from the wine-cup. They
dare not stand up for truth or for justice.
The longest purse gains the judgment of the
court.

It was probably before the prophet uttered
these final woes upon a corrupt society that he
tried another method. At a later date our
Lord spoke to men in parables. So too Isaiah.
He was the first to write a parable of the
vineyard. It is in the form of a poem—a
song that men might sing. It has been thus
beautifully translated by Professor Cheyne :

A song will I sing of my friend,

A love-song touching his vineyard.

A vineyard belongs to my friend.

On a hill that is fruitful and sunny ;

He digged it, and cleared it of stones,

And planted there vines that are choice ;

A tower he built in the midst,

And hewed also therein a wine-vat ;

And he looked to find grapes that are good,

Alas ! it bore grapes that are wild.

Ye, in Jerusalem dwelling,
 And ye, who are freemen of Judah,
 Judge ye, I pray, between me
 And my cherished vineyard.
 What could have been done for my vineyard
 That I had not done ?
 When I looked to find grapes that are good,
 Why bore it grapes that are wild ?
 And now let me give you to know
 What I purpose to do with my vineyard.
 I will take away its hedge,
 That it be eaten up,
 I will break through its walls,
 That it be trodden down ;
 Yea, I will make it a waste,
 Neither pruned nor weeded.

It shall shoot up in thorns and briars,
 And the clouds will I enjoin that they rain not upon it.
 For the vineyard of Yahweh Sabaoth is the House of Israel,
 And the men of Judah His cherished plantation ;
 And He looked for justice, but behold ! bloodshed ;
 For righteousness, but behold ! an outcry.

How and when according to our prophet
 was this sentence of doom to be effected ?
 It was to take place in " the day of Yahweh,"
 and the agent would be the King of Assyria.
 Very terrible would this day of Yahweh be
 upon the guilty nation.

Men shall go into caverns of rocks, and into holes of the
 ground,

At the terror of Yahweh, and the splendour of His
majesty,
When He arises to strike awe throughout the earth.¹

In another passage Isaiah enumerates the various judgments which have already fallen on Israel, and been disregarded. Syria on the east, and the Philistines on the west, "have devoured the nation greedily." Intestine quarrels have also devastated Palestine. Manasseh devoured Ephraim, and Ephraim devoured Manasseh, and both together had been against Judah.

For all this His anger turned not away,
And still was His hand outstretched.²

The final instrument of punishment will be Assyria, "The rod of Yahweh's anger, and the staff of His indignation."³

So He will raise a signal to a distant nation.
And hiss to them to come from the end of the earth ;
And lo ! speedily, swiftly they come.
None there is weary, and among them none stumbles ;
The zone of their loins is not loosened, of their sandals
there tears not a thong ;
Their arrows are sharpened, and their bows are all bent ;
The hoofs of their horses are counted as flint, and as
a whirlwind their wheels ;

¹ Isa. ii. 19.

² Isa. ix. 21.

³ Isa. x. 5.

Their roaring is like that of the lion, yea, like young lions they roar,
 And growl, and seize the prey, and carry it off safe, and none rescues it.¹

But even so the destruction would not be complete. Shear-Yashub, "a remnant shall return," was the name given by the prophet to one of his sons. Hence Isaiah believed in the inviolability of Jerusalem. Sinful as the city was, it was the one spot on earth where Yahweh was worshipped. When the days of its punishment were over, the remnant of believers would form a new Israel, under the rule of a Davidic king who would be a man after Yahweh's own heart. The character of this king will be more fully discussed in the chapter which deals with the growth of the Messianic idea.

But was there no possibility that Israel might escape her doom? The prophet believed there was, but it lay upon the path of repentance and reform;—the path that the nation would not take. Under the influence of Isaiah, Hezekiah did attempt the work of reformation. We read that "he removed the high places,

¹ Isa. v. 26.

and brake the pillars, and cut down the Asherah ; and he brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made ; for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it ; and he called it Nehushtan ”¹ —a bit of brass. Further, the same historian makes Rabshakeh refer to these actions of Hezekiah : “ But if ye say unto me, We trust in Yahweh our God ; is not that He, whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah hath taken away, and hath said to Judah and Jerusalem, ye shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem.”² Many critics, are of opinion that in attributing these changes to Hezekiah, the historian is anticipating reforms which did not actually take place till the reign of Josiah. But it must not be forgotten that, while we admit the partial nature of the reformation, its reality is assured by the great religious reaction in the reign of Manasseh.

On the other hand, all these things were externals. They were right and necessary, no doubt—in fact, essential to religious progress. But Isaiah knew that God demanded more than these things. A complete moral change

¹ II Kings xviii. 4.

² II Kings xviii. 22.

must be effected in the people. Men could only serve Yahweh in "the way of holiness." The editor of the writings of Isaiah considered the moral side of the prophet's teaching so important that he made it the preface to the whole book :

Hear Yahweh's word, ye chieftains of Sodom !

Give ear to our God's instruction, ye people of Gomorrah !

What care I for the great number of your sacrifices ? saith
Yahweh :

I am sated with burnt offerings of rams, and fat of fed
beasts ;

Wash you, make you clean, let Me see the evil of your
doings no more.

Seek out justice, chastise the violent,

Right the orphan, plead for the widow.

Come now, and let us argue together, saith Yahweh :

If your sins be scarlet, they may become white as snow ;

Be they red as crimson, they may become as wool.

If ye be willing and obedient, the good of the land shall
ye eat ;

But if ye refuse and resist, by the sword be ye eaten !

The mouth of Yahweh has spoken it.¹

¹ Isa. i. 10-20.

CHAPTER XII

THE REFORMS OF JOSIAH

HEZEKIAH died in the year 695 B.C., and was succeeded by his son Manasseh, a lad of about twelve years of age. It is also very probable that Isaiah, the guide, counsellor, and friend of Hezekiah, died either immediately before, or at any rate shortly after, his master. For during the reign of Manasseh we are face to face with a tremendous religious reaction, and we hear nothing of the prophet. It is impossible to believe that he was alive and silent. In the sacred history we read of no opposition to the religious reforms of Hezekiah. The King and the prophet working together were apparently too strong to admit of it. But you cannot interfere with popular religious beliefs without creating hostility. There were those to whom the local high places appeared essential to the very existence of religion. They had been hallowed by

immemorial usage. There were also doubtless those to whom the destruction of the brasen serpent appeared an act of sacrilege. The opposition also which always exists more or less between city and country must not be overlooked. Why should Jerusalem be magnified at the expense of Bethel, and Gilgal, and Hebron? The reforms of Hezekiah were absolutely necessary in the interests of true religion, but to the mass of the people they appeared blasphemous and iconoclastic innovations.

For we must remember that Manasseh and Amon, just as much as Isaiah and Hezekiah, represented a real religious conviction. All the strength of conservatism was on their side. In later times the synagogue supplied the place of the local shrines; but at the time of the destruction of the latter no substitute was proposed—indeed, no substitute would have been possible.

At any rate, the death of Hezekiah was the signal for the complete reversal of his religious policy. The 'high places were restored, and a sacred Asherah was placed in the Temple at Jerusalem. Ahaz, the father

of Hezekiah, had shown a partiality for the worship of Molech. Manasseh, his grandson, caused one of his own children "to pass through the fire," and this barbarous custom became common in Jerusalem. We are further told that "he bowed down to all the host of heaven, and served them,"¹ and built altars in honour of these celestial bodies in the very precincts of the Temple of Yahweh. This adoration of the stars may have been borrowed from Assyria, but we have seen that it formed the basis of the worship of all the early Semitic clans.

There is an obscure passage in the book of Amos which seems to point to the worship of the host of heaven by the children of Israel during the period of the wanderings in the wilderness. The true text is uncertain, but the sense seems to be: "Did ye offer *Me* sacrifices in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel? Did ye not bear about your king, Sakkut, and your star-god, Kewan?"² The latter deity is undoubtedly to be identified with the planet Saturn. This interpretation gives a better sense than that

¹ II Chron. xxxiii. 3.

² Amos v. 25.

which makes the statement a threat referring to what was actually happening in the time of the prophet. As Wellhausen points out, the Israelites in the days of Amos were not chargeable with the worship of Assyrian gods.

It is, however, very probable that, inasmuch as the religion of Yahweh had through the centuries been differentiating itself from that of the old heathen deities, King Manasseh, when re-introducing idolatry into Jerusalem, was in matters of ritual influenced by the practices existing in Assyria, then the dominant power in the East.

It is evident that the prophetic party made a vigorous protest against this retrograde movement. Probably their opposition took the form of open resistance, for we read that the King shed much innocent blood in Jerusalem. But, Manasseh, unless openly resisted, was not likely to become a persecutor. He was apparently ready to welcome every form of religion. But, like the early Christian Church, toleration was not sufficient for the true worshippers of Yahweh. In accordance with their principles they waged

war upon all that they knew to be false, superstitious, or impure.

During the reigns of Manasseh and Amon the Church of Yahweh had thus to enter upon a period of persecution—had to become, so to speak, the Church of the Catacombs. But in this dark period the foundations for future progress were laid. This outburst of heathenism enabled men to see more clearly the essential principles of the legislation of Moses, and to see also how far the regulations in regard to ritual and practice must be modified in order to meet the requirements of a new age with new social conditions. So the followers of Isaiah took counsel together. The memory of their master's spirit encouraged them "in the dark and cloudy day." Yahweh was certain to conquer in the end. So in quiet they prepared themselves for brighter times.

Their views were reduced to writing, possibly in the early part of the reign of Josiah, but more probably in the later years of Manasseh. The book was then hidden away until the time of persecution should be over. What then was this book? We answer that

it was the second law, and that it contained the principal parts of what we now call Deuteronomy. It was deposited for safety in the Temple, but during troublous times of neglect and disorder it was mislaid or lost.

In the year 621 B.C., eighteen years after the accession of the boy-king, Josiah, a thorough renovation of the fabric of the Temple was determined on. During the progress of the work the book was found by Hilki'ah, the high priest. Then, one day, Shaphan, the King's scribe or secretary, was sent to Hilki'ah with a message from the King. To him the high priest showed the book, and Shaphan brought it to Josiah. The King, in astonishment and fear, sent to Huldah, the prophetess, for advice, and she returned him this answer: "As touching the words which thou hast heard, because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before Yahweh, when thou heardest what I spake against this place and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before Me; I also have heard thee, saith Yahweh. Therefore, behold, I will gather thee to thy fathers,

and thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace, neither shall thine eyes see all the evil which I will bring upon this place.”¹

It was not a comforting answer; but, if the King was to be forgiven, perhaps the whole nation might obtain mercy. So Josiah gathered together the elders of Judah and Jerusalem, and in the house of Yahweh he read aloud all the words of the Book of the Covenant, and there and then both King and people bound themselves to obey the law.

First, then, we ask, What was the general scope and plan of this book? Now a mere code of laws is never likely to arouse enthusiasm. On the other hand, prophetic declarations, while abounding in exhortation, often lack point and definiteness. The same may be said of much of our modern preaching. But the mass of the people require to be told definitely what they are to do, and what they are not to do. Now this book of Deuteronomy unites in a unique way the legal and the prophetic. The laws are there, but their observance is enjoined with all the fervour and unction of the prophets.

¹ II Kings xxii. 18.

We must now turn to the consideration of the contents of this book. There was at the time of its publication a written law in existence, even although its precepts may have been neglected. We call it *JE*, and we have seen that it was formed out of two earlier narratives, which took shape in the northern and southern kingdoms respectively. This book is the foundation of the Deuteronomic code. All its essential principles are contained in the second law, only they are amplified and emphasised. In many cases the very words of the older book are quoted. In fact, Deuteronomy xii.—xxvi. is simply an enlarged edition of Exodus xx. 22—xxiii. 33, commonly called “the Book of the Covenant.”

But we have seen that there is another section of the Pentateuch, known as the Priests’ Code, and dating from the time of the Exile. It is important to notice that there are no verbal parallels between Deuteronomy and the priestly code; “while in the laws which touch upon common ground, great and irreconcilable discrepancies often display themselves.” I therefore conclude that the legislation of Deuteronomy is based on the old

Mosaic legislation contained in *JE*, and is quite independent of *P*. The same is true of the historical portions of the book. Here also whole passages are transcribed verbatim from *JE*.

But over and above the legislative and historical there is a third element in the book of Deuteronomy—viz. the Hortatory. The book is above all an appeal by a devoted servant of Yahweh to the consciences of his fellow-countrymen. Israel owes everything to Yahweh. He is God alone who brought the people forth out of the land of Egypt, who guided them through the wilderness, who placed them in the land of His promise ; therefore they must love Yahweh, their God, with all their heart, and with all their soul, and with all their strength.

Such briefly being the character of this book, we are now in a position to consider wherein it mainly differs from the older legislation of *JE*.

The most important point is the centralisation of worship at Jerusalem. Such an injunction would have been impossible in earlier times, or indeed during the existence of the

northern kingdom. It followed that the local shrines or high places were everywhere abolished. But first the Temple itself had to be purified. The vessels made for the worship of Baal and of the host of heaven were destroyed. The Asherah was removed and burnt. The houses where, under the guise of religion, prostitution and immorality were practised, were broken down. The horses dedicated to the sun-god were removed, and the chariots burned with fire. Also the Topheth, where children were offered to Molech, was defiled so that no man might hereafter make his son or daughter to pass through the fire. The altars on the roof, dedicated to the host of heaven, were destroyed, as well as those outside Jerusalem which had been erected by Solomon for his wives.

The Temple thus purified, the King was able to proceed with the more difficult part of his reforms. All the sanctuaries in honour of Yahweh throughout the country were done away with, except the Temple at Jerusalem. The Levitical priests at these local religious centres were brought into the city. But the Temple there having probably a full com-

plement of priests, the strangers sank into a subservient position. Hence at a later time we find two grades of priests, who were the cause of subsequent legislation. On the other hand, the priests of foreign divinities, whose cults had previously been encouraged, met with a worse fate, and were apparently all put to the sword. Thus was idolatry virtually abolished, and the monotheism preached by the prophets was established as the national faith. Death was to be the penalty for any one who either practised idolatry himself, or sought to induce others to do so.

But it may be urged that the centralisation—or, indeed, the localisation—of the worship of Yahweh in Jerusalem was a retrograde movement. We must, however, judge of it by the necessities of the time. Had this step not been taken, the religion of Yahweh might have perished in the catastrophes which followed. Monotheism demanded the change. Religious progress demanded it. For before you can advance in religious matters you must purify. Therefore the old religious centres, connected with Baal and other deities, had to be swept away, and the conduct of public

worship had to come under the control of men pledged to the worship of Yahweh, and of Yahweh only. It is the same in things political. If a number of petty states are to be formed into one kingdom, authority must be centralised. That is always first. But when men have learned the value of their citizenship, and have realised their responsibilities, then you can have a decentralisation of authority. Local affairs at any rate can be managed locally.

It is true, on the other hand, that the Israelites learned their lesson almost too well. Only a few years pass, and the very fact of the existence of the Temple and of its services became for them a guarantee of safety, irrespective of the character of the lives of the worshippers. At a later time disrespect to the Temple was one of the charges against our Lord. It was the accusation which caused the murder of St. Stephen. "Believe Me, the hour cometh when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem shall ye worship the Father. But the hour cometh and now is when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth ; for such doth the Father

seek to be His worshippers. God is spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth.”¹ These words contain an idea which the Jew found it almost impossible to grasp.

But over and above all regulations in regard to ritual, the book of Deuteronomy is important because of the emphasis it lays upon the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel. It was Yahweh who chose Israel, and therefore will be faithful to the people of His choice. Yahweh loved Israel. This is the true basis of religion. The servant of Yahweh must therefore love God, and love also his fellow-Israelites who, with himself, composed Yahweh's people.

Such, briefly and in outline, is the character of this momentous book. The day when it was read in the ears of the people was the most important in the history of Israel from the time of the Exodus. Henceforward all the people of Yahweh had a book to which they could appeal. And yet its results were not altogether what its authors intended. Written under prophetic influence to purify and deepen

¹ John iv. 21.

the religious life of Israel, it tended at the last to exalt the priesthood and to formalise religion. This was the inevitable result of the centralisation of all public acts of worship in Jerusalem. In the course of time the prophetic voice was silenced, and Judaism, with its intolerable trivialities and its wearisome minutiae, became stereotyped. Yet, after all,—

‘The Law was the tutor unto Christ.’

CHAPTER XIII

TO THE EXILE

WE now retrace our steps for a little way. In the previous chapter I have dealt with the reforms of Josiah, because I desired to connect them with the attempts of Hezekiah in the same direction. But there is an episode in the history of eastern nations which, although not mentioned directly in the Old Testament, profoundly influenced the course of events, and was apparently the cause of two notable prophetic utterances. I refer to the invasion of the Assyrian empire by wild hordes of Scythians, who, starting from Southern Russia, devastated the whole of Western Asia, overpowered Media, ravaged Assyria, and swept westward as far as the borders of Egypt. For years they established no empire, but remained a tribe of wandering warriors, the terror of all governments, sup-

porting themselves by plunder, and devouring the wealth of the settled inhabitants. This invasion seems to have occupied the years between 640 B.C. and 615 B.C. From it the Assyrian empire never recovered.

About the year 630 B.C. the prophet Nahum saw in these wild freebooters the avengers of Israel. What the northern tribes and the city of Samaria had suffered at the hands of Sargon, Assyria and Nineveh would suffer at the hands of the Scythians. The book of Nahum is short, but it contains the most vivid writing in the Old Testament. He calls it an oracle concerning Nineveh. It consists indeed of four short oracles. The first deals with the character of Yahweh, and the certainty of His help.¹ The second describes the savage invaders,² while two war-songs against Nineveh complete the book.

The name of the coming destroyers of Nineveh is not mentioned. Perhaps Nahum had no name for them, but he gives us a graphic and vivid picture of the attack as the wild tribes swoop down upon the city.

¹ Nah. i. 1-15.

² Nah. ii. 1-5.

They are Yahweh's instruments of punishment.

The shield of His mighty men is made red,
The valiant men are in scarlet;
The chariots flash with steel in the day of His preparation,
And the spears are shaken terribly.
The chariots rage in the streets,
They jostle one against another in the broad ways,
The appearance of them is like torches,
They run like the lightnings.¹

For terrible is the wrath of Yahweh. What happened to Thebes shall happen to Nineveh, the mistress of witchcrafts and of cruelty, and there shall be none to bemoan her, when her king and people sleep for ever in the dust.

Nahum's idea of God is not that of Amos nor of Isaiah. Rather as we read his book we find ourselves transported back to the time of the judges. Nahum is of the same spiritual kin as Elijah. Yahweh is indeed the over-lord of the world, but He retains most of His ancient characteristics. He is still the storm-god :

Yahweh hath His way in the whirlwind and in the storm,
And the clouds are the dust of His feet.²

¹ Nah. ii. 3-4.

² Nah. i. 3.

His path too, as of old, is upon the mountains, which tremble at His footsteps. It is there that He will publish good tidings. Here we have no thought of the Deuteronomic legislation. Yahweh is to the prophet almost the personification of the genius of Israel. Is Nahum's heart inflamed with wrath as he thinks of what Israel had suffered at the hands of Assyria?—so, and not otherwise, does Yahweh feel. Do wild words of almost frenzied denunciation burst from the prophet's lips?—such are the words, of Yahweh, the strong, fierce, passionate Storm-god, who taketh vengeance on His adversaries, but who is a good stronghold for them that put their trust in Him.

There is no thought of the necessity for popular reformation in the writings of Nahum. He represents rather the long-impotent wrath and desire for vengeance on Assyria which must have actuated the great mass of the people.

Very different was the word that came to Zephaniah, a descendant of Hezekiah. He too prophesied during the period of the Scythian terror, and his work must be assigned to a

date very little later than that of Nahum. We shall be probably not far wrong if we put the date at the year 626 B.C., when the Scythian hordes were devastating the territory of the Philistines. For the theme of Zephaniah is the day of Yahweh. But his ideas in regard to it are those of Amos, and not of Nahum. He sometimes quotes the very words of the older prophet.

This day of Yahweh will be terrible upon the earth. Man and beast, the fowls of heaven and the fishes of the sea, will alike be sharers in the wrath of God.

The great day of Yahweh is near,
It is near and hasteth greatly,
The voice of the day of Yahweh !
The mighty man crieth there bitterly,
That day is a day of wrath,
A day of trouble and distress,
A day of wasteness and desolation,
A day of darkness and gloominess,
A day of clouds and thick darkness,
A day of the trumpet and alarm
Against the fenced cities and against the high
battlements.¹

The picture which Zephaniah gives us of the religious life of Jerusalem is very similar

¹ Zeph i. 14.

to that of Isaiah. In the day of Yahweh the Baals and their worshippers shall be destroyed. Doom will fall upon those who adore the host of heaven. Followers of Yahweh and followers of Molech shall be consumed together. Dagon will not save his worshippers. Like Isaiah, the prophet has a special woe for the scoffers—"the men that are settled on their lees,¹ that say in their heart, 'Yahweh will not do good, neither will He do evil.'" With an echo of Amos he declares :

Their wealth shall become a spoil, and their houses a desolation ;
 Yea, they shall build houses, but shall not inhabit them ;
 And they shall plant vineyards, but shall not drink the wine thereof.

How can Jerusalem remain what she is, and hope to escape the wrath of God?—

Woe to her that is rebellious and polluted, to the oppressing city !
 She obeyed not the voice, she received not instruction,
 She trusted not in Yahweh, she drew not near to her God.
 Her princes in the midst of her are roaring lions,
 Her judges are evening wolves,
 They leave nothing till the morrow.

¹ Zeph. i. 12.

Her prophets are light and treacherous persons,
Her priests have profaned the sanctuary,
They have done violence to the law.¹

This denunciation was probably uttered when the Scythians were near at hand, and actually devastating Philistia. Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron shall feel the fury of the invaders, as well as Moab and Ammon, Egypt, Assyria, and Jerusalem. But shall none escape? Only the holy and humble men of heart :

Seek ye Yahweh, all ye meek of the earth,
Which have wrought judgment ;
Seek righteousness, seek meekness ;
It may be ye shall be hid in the day of Yahweh's anger.²

For Zephaniah also believes in the survival of a remnant of the people, who shall be true servants of Yahweh, "who shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies, neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth."³ Very beautiful is his picture of the days of restoration, when Yahweh shall again be King of Israel, and the people shall not fear evil any more.

¹ Zeph. iii. 1.

² Zeph. ii. 3.

³ Zeph. iii. 13.

The immediate danger portrayed by Zephaniah passed away. Events moved more slowly than the prophet imagined. Forty years of miserable existence had to pass over Jerusalem before her doom was accomplished; for the footsteps of fate were approaching slowly but relentlessly. Four years before the reforms of Josiah, Babylon, under Nabopolassar, asserted her independence of Assyria. The latter empire, weakened by successive inroads of the Scythians or Cimmerians—called in the cuneiform inscriptions “Umman-manda,” “the barbarians”—was unable to reduce her former vassal. A few years later, Necho II., King of Egypt, resolved to take advantage of the impotence of Assyria, and to annex to his own kingdom the western regions of Asia. Accordingly, he invaded Palestine, where he was opposed by Josiah, who was faithful in his allegiance to Assyria. A great battle was fought at Har-Megiddon, where the Israelites were defeated and their king slain. The action of Josiah in this matter seems to have been unwise. It is quite possible that the Egyptian king, passing through the north of Palestine, would not have turned aside to

attack Jerusalem, well knowing that the city would be part of the spoils of the victor in the greater struggle. At any rate, Har-Megiddon has become for ever a name of conflict and disaster. The mountain and the plain where Sisera fled before Barak, and where the good Josiah fell in an unequal struggle, have been selected by the author of the Apocalypse as the scene of the final struggle between good and evil.

A few months later, with the fall of Nineveh, the Assyrian empire came to an end. The struggle for future supremacy in the East lay therefore between Egypt and Babylon. Necho advanced towards the Euphrates. Nabopolassar sent his son Nebuchadnezzar to oppose his progress. In a great battle at Carchemish the Egyptians were utterly routed, and a hasty flight alone saved the king and the remnants of his army.

The death of Josiah threw everything into confusion in Jerusalem. The people elected his son, Shallum, as his successor, thus passing over Eliakim, his elder brother. This monarch assumed the name of Jehoahaz, "Yahweh hath grasped." Three months later he was

summoned by Pharaoh to Riblah, on the Orontes, and thence taken as a prisoner to Egypt, while Eliakim was placed on the throne under the name Jehoiakim. The sad fate of Shallum called forth the regret and sympathy of both Jeremiah and Ezekiel. "Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him : but weep sore for him that goeth away ; for he shall return no more, nor see his native country."¹ It was better to fall as Josiah on the field of battle than to endure the miseries of captivity and death in a strange land.

The natural result of the defeat of Pharaoh Necho at Carchemish was that Judæa came under the authority of Babylon, and for three years Jehoiakim was the faithful vassal of Nebuchadnezzar. Urged probably by Egypt, he then revolted, and the Babylonian king resolved to effect the complete subjugation of the entire district. He made his headquarters at Riblah, and apparently in some skirmish Jehoiakim was killed. This sovereign was perhaps the most worthless king who ever sat upon the throne of Judah. He was suc-

¹ Jer. xxii. 10.

ceeded by his son Jehoiachin, but three months after his accession Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem, which surrendered unconditionally. The conqueror denuded the city of all its treasures, and "he carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon; and the king's mother, and the king's wives, and his officers, and the chief men of the land, carried he into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon. And all the men of might, even seven thousand, and the craftsmen and the smiths a thousand, all of them strong and apt for war."¹ These figures suggest a train of captives numbering between forty and fifty thousand.

These events took place in the year 579 B.C. The captives were settled in Babylonia as a community, and were not distributed over the empire. Here we have the secret of the preservation of Judah. The policy of Assyria was to destroy nationality, and so the ten tribes were scattered and merged in the native population. The Babylonian conqueror permitted the captives from Jerusalem to dwell together, and by this policy their return from exile was rendered possible.

¹ II Kings xxiv. 15.

Such, in brief outline, are the events which immediately followed upon the death of Josiah. This period of darkness and disappointment created perplexity in the minds of all the people. Josiah had carried out his reforms. The book of Deuteronomy was the accepted lawbook of the nation, and in it the people read that, if they hearkened diligently unto the voice of Yahweh, their God, all these blessings would come upon them: "Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the young of thy flock. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy kneading-trough. Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out. Yahweh shall cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thee; they shall come out against thee one way, and shall flee before thee seven ways."¹ And now the reformation had been completed, the high places had been 'swept away, Yahweh alone was worshipped, and yet, what did

¹ Deut. xxviii. 3.

they see? They beheld their land devastated by wild hosts of Chaldæans, the army of Nebuchadnezzar. They themselves were subjects of a cruel and heathen conqueror. Their king, whose advice they had followed in things religious, had himself fallen in desperate conflict against the Egyptian invader. It was they who had gone out one way, and had fled before their enemies seven ways.

The result was a cleavage in public opinion. The majority of the people, including the King and his Court, abjured Yahweh, and went back to heathenism. The testimony of Jeremiah against them is that they had done worse than their fathers. The Baalim again had incense offered to them. Altars and Asherahs were erected under green trees on the high hills. The worship of Molech was revived, and children were sacrificed again in the valley of Hinnom. Once more the abomination of idols was to be seen in the very Temple of Yahweh. Astarte, queen of heaven, had again her women votaries, who, at a later time, declared that they had the approval of their husbands. The latter are represented as saying : " We will certainly perform every

word that is gone forth out of our mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, for then had we plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil. But since we left off to burn incense to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, we have wanted all things, and have been consumed by the sword and by the famine.”¹ It was in the reign of Jehoiakim that Jeremiah wrote: “For according to the number of thy cities are thy gods, O Judah; and according to the number of the streets of Jerusalem have ye set up altars to the shame, even altars to burn incense unto Baal.”²

On the other side, the best of the followers of Yahweh were openly perplexed. We have an illustration of their state of mind in the book of the prophet Habakkuk. His work is dramatic in style, and is in the form of a controversy between the prophet and Yahweh. Habakkuk speaks first. There is wickedness

¹ Jer. xliv. 17.

² Jer. xi. 13.

everywhere in Judah, does not Yahweh behold it? To him Yahweh replies that He has raised up the Chaldæans as His instruments of punishment. A vivid description follows of their fierceness, and their irresistible advance. They worship their own strength. Even their horses are fiercer than evening wolves. But this answer only increases the perplexity of the prophet. How can a good God employ such agents? The people of Jerusalem may be wicked, but the Chaldæans are worse, and shall they be permitted "to slay the nations continually?" Habakkuk is directed to commit Yahweh's answer to writing, and "to make it plain upon tables."¹

Behold his soul is puffed up, it is not upright in him;
But the just shall live in his faithfulness.

The explanation of this somewhat enigmatic utterance seems to be as follows. The first clause refers to Babylon. The Chaldæan empire trusts in its own might alone; it is puffed up and presumptuous. Therefore it shall surely perish. But the righteous, they who trust in Yahweh, shall endure, in spite

¹ Hab. ii. 2.

of all appearances to the contrary. Then follows a series of woes upon Chaldæa, and upon all worshippers of idols, while a confident hope is expressed that a day is coming when "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of Yahweh, as the waters cover the sea."¹ But even so, this is a far-distant hope, and the present is full of perplexity, and sorrow, and evil, and unrest. So the prophet prays for a speedy fulfilment, and he then beholds, as in a vision, the coming of Yahweh to judgment. After this he can leave the future to God. The riddle of human life may be too hard for him to understand, but he can believe that the things which seem amiss "shall be unriddled by-and-bye," and he therefore has faith to say :

For though the fig-tree shall not blossom,
 Neither shall fruit be in the vines ;
 The labour of the olive shall fail,
 And the fields shall yield no meat ;
 The flocks shall be cut off from the fold,
 And there shall be no herd in the stalls :
 Yet I will rejoice in Yahweh,
 I will joy in the God of my salvation.²

But we obtain the fullest picture of this

¹ Hab. ii. 14.

² Hab. iii. 17.

distracted time from the writings of Jeremiah. He received his prophetic call in the thirteenth year of the reign of King Josiah, five years before the reformation, in which, however, he seems to have taken little part. Of priestly descent, he was a native of the village of Anathoth, whither Solomon had banished Abiathar. In graphic language he describes his mental and spiritual struggle before entering upon his lifework. Here we have no eager offer of service, as in the case of Isaiah's "Here am I, send me." His natural timidity and irresolution seem to have been overcome only by the strong impulse of the Spirit of God. In chapters ii.—vi. we have the substance of his prophetic teaching during the reign of Josiah, and his attitude to the reformation. We see at once that his idea of the prophetic work is wider than that of any of his predecessors. His message is to all nations. There is one God, one earth, and one human family. Yahweh is wakeful like the almond-tree. Nothing done on earth escapes His notice. The mouth of the seething cauldron is towards the north, because from the mysterious, unknown, northern lands will

issue forth the instruments of the vengeance of God upon all nations. Here, as in the case of other prophets of this period, we have probably an allusion to the Scythians.

Jeremiah can see no hope for Judah. The warning which Yahweh gave her in the destruction of the northern kingdom has been disregarded. It is of no use for them to plead the reforms of Josiah. Those reforms have only dealt with externals. Has any man in Jerusalem, in consequence of them, changed his heart or reformed his life? For Jeremiah is an individualist. Personal reformation, personal religion, personal purity—these are what Yahweh demands. Let every man break up his own fallow ground. God will receive the nation as individuals—"one of a city, and two of a family."¹ The reformation What has it done? It has only at the most "healed lightly the hurt of the daughter of my people."²

In this attitude of Jeremiah we have the origin of the hostility displayed towards him by the religious leaders of the day. The priests and the prophets were satisfied with

¹ Jer. iii. 14.

² Jer. vi. 14.

what had been effected. They proclaimed peace where Jeremiah insisted that there was no peace. The sin of the people is the fault of the prophets, and he therefore thus pleads with Yahweh: "Ah, Lord God! behold the prophets say unto them, ye shall not see the sword, neither shall ye have famine; but I will give you assured peace in this place. Then Yahweh said unto me, the prophets prophesy lies in My name."¹ Jeremiah sees that it is a false peace, and he thus sums up the situation: "A wonderful and horrible thing is come to pass in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means: and My people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?"²

The deportation of Jehoiachin and the first exiles to Babylon was to the prophet the beginning of the end. The time for pleading with God on behalf of the people is over. He can only endeavour to induce them to acquiesce in the decree of Yahweh, and submit to Babylon. But he was alone in a struggle, the nature of which is well illustrated by his

¹ Jer. xiv. 13.

² Jer. v. 30.

meeting with Hananiah. In the fourth year of Zedekiah, with the approval of the religious authorities, a plan of rebellion was formed against the King of Babylon. Jeremiah one day appeared in the Temple with a yoke, the symbol of slavery, upon his neck. In the name of Yahweh he urged the people to submit, and warned them that any attempt at conspiracy would only lead to the total destruction of the city. Hananiah answered him, speaking also in the name of Yahweh, and asserted that Yahweh was about to break the yoke of the King of Babylon, and that within two years the sacred vessels, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away, would be restored to the Temple on the return of Jehoiachin and the exiles. Jeremiah pointed out that his predecessors had spoken in the same spirit as himself, and that Hananiah could not be recognised as a messenger of Yahweh, until events had proved the truth of his predictions. Thereupon Hananiah snatched the yoke from off Jeremiah's neck and broke it in pieces, declaring: "Thus saith Yahweh: Even so will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, within two full years from off the

neck of all the nations.”¹ Here, as on similar occasions in history, the man who prophesied smooth things had the people with him.

Wonderfully interesting, too, is the letter which the prophet wrote to the exiles in Babylon: “Thus saith Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel, unto all the Captivity, whom I have caused to be carried away captive from Jerusalem unto Babylon. Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply ye there, and be not diminished. And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray unto Yahweh for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace. For thus saith Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel: Let not your prophets that be in the midst of you, and your diviners, deceive you, neither hearken ye to your dreams which ye dream. For they prophesy falsely unto you in My name; I have not sent them, saith Yahweh.

¹ Jer. xxviii. 11.

For thus saith Yahweh : After seventy years be accomplished for Babylon, I will visit you, and perform My good word toward you in causing you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith Yahweh, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you hope in your latter end. And ye shall call upon Me, and ye shall go and pray unto Me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart." ¹

Always in opposition to public opinion, the prophet lived a life of perpetual hardship and persecution. Plots were formed against his life. At one time he was in hiding, at another he was arrested, beaten, flung into a dungeon, and left to die. Finally, in 586 B.C., Jerusalem was taken after a siege of eighteen months, and Jeremiah was vindicated as a true prophet. The sons of Zedekiah were slain miserably before his eyes, and he himself was then blinded, and taken in fetters to Babylon, where he died in prison. The Temple and the principal buildings were burned, and the

¹ Jer. xxix. 4.

walls of the city levelled. Nearly all the important personages were put to death, and the greater part of the people were carried captive to Babylon. Only the poorest were left, to be vinedressers and husbandmen. Over these Gedaliah was appointed governor, with his residence at Mizpeh.

The conquerors treated Jeremiah with much respect. He was permitted to choose whether he would go to Babylon or remain in Jerusalem. He elected to stay with Gedaliah, who was his friend. The latter was shortly afterwards assassinated by Ishmael, a member of the royal family, and many of his followers, including some Chaldæans, were massacred. Then the men of war, under a leader named Johanan, afraid of the vengeance of the King of Babylon, fled to Egypt, where they settled at Tahpanhes. They forced Jeremiah to accompany them. We know that he continued his ministry in Egypt, and tradition asserts that he finally met with a martyr's death at the hands of his own people.

Persecuted, hated, and despised during life, Jeremiah was canonised by the succeeding generation. The people began to see in him,

the suffering servant of Yahweh, a type of their nation. Rejected during life, he came afterwards to be accounted the greatest of the prophets.

With the fall of Jerusalem the days of the Hebrew nation came to an end. The day of the Jewish Church had not yet dawned.

CHAPTER XIV

THE EXILE

HENCEFORWARD interest mainly centres in the exiles in Babylon. At first, apparently, they did not realise what their captivity meant. Messengers passed between them and those left in Jerusalem ; and, if there was a spirit of unrest and rebellion in the city, it existed also quite as strongly amongst the exiles. There were prophets of the stamp of Hananiah in Babylon, and the people boasted of their presence. It is indeed reasonable to infer, from Jeremiah xxix. 21, that two such, Ahab the son of Kolaiah and Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah, were actually put to death by Nebuchadnezzar. It was hard for the captives to realise that the third generation would be born before a return to Jerusalem could be possible.

How, then, was the news of the capture of

Jerusalem for the second time, and its complete destruction, received by the Jews in Babylon? At first with an outburst of passionate wrath, and this afterwards passed into the sullenness of despair. The hope of a return grew weaker as the years went by, the prophetic voice was silent, and a desire for material prosperity in the country of her exile became the dominant feature in the life of Israel.

Before the Captivity Ezekiel, the son of Buzi, had been a priest in Jerusalem. Carried away with the first stream of captives in 597 B.C., for four years we hear nothing of him. In the fifth year of his banishment he appears as a prophet, living at an unidentified town called Tel-Abib, situated on the River Chebar, which was probably a tributary of the Euphrates. We would give much for what Ezekiel could have told us, and has not. What a picture he could have given us of the religious, social, and mercantile life of the captives in Babylon, if he had only told us of the little things that happened day by day. But he was living in the midst of it, and to him it seemed unimportant. It was only an episode in Jewish history, the unfortunate but inevitable result

of sin, and to be blotted out by the subsequent glory of Jerusalem.

His book extends over a period of at least twenty-two years, and falls naturally into four divisions. The first twenty-four chapters cover the years up to the commencement of the second siege of Jerusalem in January 587 B.C. We have then a period of two years of retirement, during which it is probable that the greater part of chapters xxv.—xxxii. were composed. These consist of prophecies against the seven nations dwelling round Palestine—*viz.* Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon, and Egypt. The next section (chapters xxxiii.—xxxix.) deals with the period immediately following the arrival of the news of the destruction of Jerusalem. The closing chapters contain a description of an ideal theocracy to be realised hereafter in the holy city.

During the first part of his ministry Ezekiel was emphasising in Babylon the truth that Jeremiah was proclaiming in Jerusalem—*viz.* the certainty of the destruction of the city, and the exile of its inhabitants. Ezekiel was, in fact, the spiritual child of the great and

unappreciated prophet, and his message was received with the same incredulity as that of his master. Yet he exercised a powerful ministry among the captives. The elders went to his house in order to consult him. The people took pleasure in listening to his sermons.¹ In fact, Ezekiel's public ministry corresponded more closely to that of a parochial clergyman than of a prophet. He has none of the spontaneity of the great prophets. He delivers sermons rather than utters oracles. His imagery is greatly elaborated. Isaiah writes a few sentences, and, equally with himself, the reader feels that he is indeed in the presence of God. When Ezekiel would describe the advent of Deity, he gives us a long and complicated account of the four living creatures, with fourfold faces, and with fourfold wings, and of four wheels whose rings were full of eyes, and of a firmament overhead. It is grandiose rather than great.

On the question of individual responsibility Ezekiel is again the pupil of Jeremiah. A man will be judged for his own life. He may not throw the blame of his failure upon

¹ Ezek. xxxiii. 30.

another. The prophet also, as God's watchman, will be held accountable for his ministry to individuals. The individual soul is no longer the property of the family or nation. Every soul belongs to God, "Behold, all souls are mine."¹ In the assertion of this great truth Ezekiel has perhaps gone further than facts warrant. If men are too ready to throw the blame of their sufferings upon their fathers, he seems to state that a man can only suffer for his own sins. Righteousness also to him was not so much a temper of mind shaping a man's life, as a series of separate righteous acts. "Hence the individual act is taken to be a true expression of the whole man at the moment of its occurrence."² And for that act a man is judged, and the judgment is in complete accord with his deserts. In popular opinion this view soon crystallised into the theory that a man's outward circumstances were a correct index of the character of his life. The subsequent development of these views led to the vigorous protests of the books of Job and Ecclesiastes.

The prophet's love for detailed description

¹ Ezek. xviii. 4.

² Charles, *Eschatology*, p. 64.

has led him to give us a clear and valuable account of the idolatries practised in Jerusalem at this time. In the form of a vision he tells us of what he saw. At the inner gate of the Temple was the image, probably an Asherah, which provoked the jealousy of Yahweh. In a secret chamber of the Temple every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel were portrayed upon the wall, and seventy men of the elders of Israel burned incense before them.¹ This description probably refers to debased forms of superstition introduced from Egypt, especially as the degrading character of Egyptian idolatry is alluded to in a later chapter. Then at the north gate of the Temple he beheld women weeping for Tammuz. In the inner court of Yahweh's House, between the porch and the altar, stood five-and-twenty men, who turned their backs on the Temple of Yahweh, and worshipped the sun towards the east. The idolatries of Eastern and Western lands, and the native heathenism of Canaan, were thus represented in Jerusalem in the Temple of Yahweh.

¹ Ezek. viii. 10.

When the worst had happened, and when the fugitive had brought the story of the overthrow of Jerusalem, Ezekiel changed his note, and became the prophet of hope and restoration. After one final denunciation of the prophets who had led the people astray, he at once began to speak of the redemption of Israel. A new king, a veritable David, shall one day rule over a united people. Their land, recovered from the enemy, shall be their eternal possession. The people themselves, now like the dry and lifeless bones lying in the valley, shall feel a new life surging within them, when the breath of the Spirit of God shall have breathed upon them. One final struggle alone awaits them. It will take place after they have been restored to their own land, and are great and prosperous, and when all the nations with whom they have previously come into contact shall have learned and recognised the power of Yahweh. But there are many and barbarous peoples still lying outside the ken of Israel, and they also must be made to own the sovereignty of Yahweh. Aroused to hostility by the universal claims of the God of Israel, under

the leadership of Gog they will advance against Palestine, and then Yahweh will make His power to be known, and the beaten hosts of heathenism will admit that the God of Israel is God alone. So terrible will be the slaughter that the victorious Israelites will for seven months be engaged in the task of burying the slain. Such is Ezekiel's missionary method. He made a desert, and he called it peace.


Why, we may ask, is our prophet so certain of the future restoration and glory of Israel? It is because Yahweh is what He is. He is the one living and true God. All others are only idols—"block-gods," as the prophet contemptuously calls them. But in the history of the world Yahweh has been identified with Israel, and although He has found it necessary to punish His people, yet for His own sake He cannot permit them to be destroyed. The restoration of Israel, crushed for the moment by the great world-power of the day, will prove His omnipotence both to them and to the heathen. On the other hand, the fact that He found it necessary to punish them will be a proof of the moral

character of the government of Yahweh ; while the termination of the Captivity will show that His punishments are remedial, and that He hath no pleasure in the death of the wicked.¹

Finally, after thirteen years of silence, the prophet added the closing section to his book. It forms the basis of the new or post-Exilic Judaism. Its importance can scarcely be over-rated. In early life Ezekiel had performed the duties of a priest in the Temple at Jerusalem. He had lived and moved in the ideas and habits of his order. In later life, when the period of storm and stress was over, and he had leisure to elaborate his ideas in regard to the future, the priestly habit of mind again reasserted itself. For Israel is to be a Church rather than a kingdom. The Davidic king, spoken of at an earlier time, now appears merely as a prince. Solomon had his private entrance into the Temple. The new king is not to be admitted farther than the gate. Yahweh is to dwell in visible glory in the Sanctuary, carefully guarded against all pollution from the profane. From the reign of Solomon

¹ Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

priests of the family of Zadok had control over the Temple services. This privilege is to be continued and secured to them. The rest of the Levites, inasmuch as they had acted as priests at the ancient local sanctuaries, are to be degraded into the position of temple servants, and the employment of uncircumcised temple slaves is to be abolished. The domain of the priests is to be immediately round the sanctuary, with the city on the south, and the portion of the Levites on the north. The district assigned to the prince lay east and west. The following sketch will perhaps make the idea plainer :

Prince's Portion	Domain of Levites			Prince's Portion
	Priests'	<div style="text-align: center;"> Temple  </div>	Domain	
	City land	City	City land	

To the north lay Judah, and to the south Benjamin. In assigning territories to the twelve tribes Ezekiel disregards altogether the natural features of the country. He simply takes a pen and a ruler, and draws

parallel lines across the land from east to west. The territory to the west of the River Jordan is alone to be utilised, but the decrease in acreage is to be compensated for by increased powers of production. Thus, a stream flowing from beneath the threshold of the Temple will fertilise all the desert region lying to the south of the holy city.

The consideration of the peculiar character of the laws of purification and other ritual observances prescribed by the prophet will be best dealt with when we come to treat of the character of post-Exilic legislation.

For some years we have little information as to the fortunes of the Jews in Babylonia. We can infer that the conditions of life did not grow harder for them as the years passed. They acquired property, lived in separate communities, and were allowed the free exercise of their religion so far as was possible in "a strange land." On the other hand, in the cuneiform inscriptions we have sufficient material to enable us to outline the history of the Babylonian empire during the later years of the Captivity. Nebuchadnezzar died in the year 561 B.C., and left the crown

to his son Evil-Merodach (Amēl-Maruduk) "servant of Merodach." Apparently he was a merciful and kindly man, and he released the Jewish king Jehoiachin, who had languished in prison for nearly thirty-six years. After reigning a little more than two years, Evil-Merodach was slain by his sister's husband Neriglissar, who ascended the throne in 559 B.C. This king was succeeded in the year 556 B.C. by his son, who was only a youth; and who, nine months later, was slain as the outcome of a conspiracy. Nabonidus, one of the conspirators, was proclaimed King of Babylon.

A more unsuitable monarch than Nabonidus to rule over a warlike Eastern kingdom can hardly be imagined. Had he lived in our own day he would have been the learned and intelligent president of some society of antiquaries. From the standpoint of historical research, we owe more to him than to any Babylonian king, but he was useless to the empire. He delighted in the restoration of temples, but in the progress of the work he always made excavations in the foundations to find the records of early kings. These

he then caused to be transcribed along with his own annotations. His pursuits seem to have irritated the priests. No doubt the search for records appeared to them sacrilegious. They also resented his action in collecting images of deities in different towns of the empire, and sending them to the sacred city of Bel. He did not himself reside in Babylon, but handed over to his son Belshazzar the task of government. We gain a most interesting picture of the relations between father and son, and also an insight into the character of Nabonidus, from the concluding lines of an inscription which he caused to be placed in the foundations of the temple of Sin at "Ur of the Chaldees":

As for me, Nabonidus, King of Babylon,
From sin against thy great divinity
Save me, and
A life of remote days .
Give as a gift ;
And as for Belshazzar, the eldest son,
The offspring of my heart, the fear of thy great
Divinity cause thou to exist in his heart, and
Let not sin possess him, let him be satisfied with fulness of
life.

In the meantime a new power was rising

in the east, under the leadership of Cyrus, King of Ansan, a district in the south of Elam. In the year 549 B.C. he conquered the Medes, and captured Ecbatana, their chief city. Three years later he is styled King of Persia. In 538 B.C. he attacked Nabonidus from the north. The Babylonian army was defeated, and on June 14th "Sippara was taken without fighting." Nabonidus fled to Babylon, but, two days later, Gobryas with part of the army of Cyrus entered the city without meeting resistance. On October 3rd Cyrus himself came to Babylon, and assumed the title of "King of Babylonia." It seems probable from the cuneiform records that Belshazzar held out in some fortified part of the city until October 11th, when, as he was keeping a festival, the citadel was captured, and he was slain. The age of the Semite was over. That of the Indo-European had commenced.

About the time when Cyrus conquered Media the prophetic silence, which had existed for many years among the captives in Babylonia, was suddenly broken. A new voice was heard proclaiming comfort and restoration. "Comfort ye, comfort ye my

people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned ; that she has received of Yahweh's hand double for all her sins."¹ It was the voice of the great unnamed prophet, whose work is contained in the last twenty-six chapters of the present book of Isaiah.

I desire to point out as clearly as possible what are, and what are not, the reasons for believing that these later prophecies are by a hand other than that of Isaiah, the son of Amoz.

Speaking from the historical standpoint, there is an interval of one hundred and fifty years between the thirty-ninth and fortieth chapters of the present book of Isaiah. Now the question is not, Could God have inspired Isaiah to foresee the character of the Captivity, to describe the events preceding the Return, and to mention Cyrus by name as the deliverer of the people? We know that He could. The question rather is, Do the prophecies we are about to consider suggest that He did so? This is entirely a question of names. It

¹ Isa. xl. 1.

does not touch on inspiration at all. The author's name adds nothing to the value of the teaching. The name of Joel, for example, does not add anything to his prophecy. We do not know even when he lived. Now in these chapters there is no allusion to Isaiah, the son of Amoz. In the first part of the book he is constantly mentioned, and oracles are attributed to him.

Further, in the time of Isaiah the danger to Jerusalem came from Assyria. Would it not be strange that he should be inspired to tell of the rise of Cyrus, and the return from the Captivity, and yet not be inspired to tell that the Assyrian empire, which he feared, would crumble to pieces, and that the actual conqueror of Judæa would not be the King of Assyria, but the King of Babylon? This difficulty becomes all the more forcible when we remember that in these later chapters of the book the destruction of Jerusalem and the devastation of the Holy Land are represented as long accomplished facts.

Again, if this prophécy was in existence, prior to the Exile, as the admitted work of Isaiah, why did Jeremiah and Ezekiel find

it so impossible to persuade the Jews that Jerusalem must fall, and the people be taken into Captivity? Why did they never appeal to the book and say: "Not only is the Captivity absolutely certain, but here, in the book of Isaiah, you have the account of the return of your descendants." For we are distinctly told in the preface to the book of Isaiah that Hezekiah was the last king under whom the prophet exercised his ministry.

I lay little stress upon arguments founded on alleged differences of style. Variations in style will be noticed in different periods of an author's life. But the whole of these later chapters suggest a man living in the times of which he speaks. Cyrus is not presented as a prediction, but as a man actually fulfilling the will of Yahweh. As Dr. Barnes puts it: "The really significant fact is that the *Present* of the writer of chapters xl.—lxvi. is not the Present of Isaiah the son of Amoz, but the Present of a prophet who was the contemporary of Cyrus, King of Persia, and of the generation which returned from the Babylonian Captivity."¹

¹ *Churchman's Bible*, Isaiah, vol. ii. p. xi.

A devout Jew, whose whole thought centred in Jerusalem, naturally would not take a deep interest in the social life of Babylon. The book of Ezekiel is evidence of this. At the same time any local colouring which is to be found in the writings of our prophet is that of Babylon, and not of Jerusalem. We may notice in this connection the writer's familiarity with the religious rites of Babylon, "the lady of kingdoms." We have references to her diviners, astrologers, star-gazers, and monthly prognosticators;¹ to the hurried flight of Bel and Nebo; and to the great idol manufactories. There are allusions to the traffic of Babylon, to her commerce and traders, to her ships and her many waters, even to the mirage that brooded over her plains.

There is a further argument which, however, will not be appreciated by all. The critic of Shakespeare, while distinguishing between the different periods in the poet's life and their literary output, can at once separate the work of the master from that, for example, of Fletcher. It is a power derived from sympathy and knowledge. The unpoetical outsider can-

¹ Isa. xlvii. 13.

not appreciate it, nor, indeed, understand it. So in this case it is felt that the texture of the mind of the prophet of the Return is different from that of Isaiah, the son of Amoz. In the matter of pure intellect the earlier prophet seems greatly superior. From the stand-point of religion Deutero-Isaiah is on the higher level. Even in their allusions to nature we can see the difference between them.

The best divisions of the contents of the later prophet's work seems to me to be that of Dr. Barnes :

(a) The First Book of Comfort (chaps. xl.—xlv.).

(b) The First Book of Judgment on Babylon (chaps. xlv., xlvii.).

(c) The Second Book of Comfort (chaps. xlviii. 1—lii. 12.).

(d) The Book of the Servant of Yahweh (chaps. lii. 13—liii. 12.).

(e) The Third Book of Comfort (chaps. liv. lv.).

(f) The Book of Remonstrance with Israel (chaps. lvi.—lix.).

(g) The Fourth Book of Comfort (chaps. lx.—lxiii. 6).

(*h*) The Book of Appeal to Yahweh (chaps. lxiii. 7—lxiv. 12).

(*i*) The Book of Yahweh's Decision (chaps. lxv. lxvi.).

The message of the prophet to Israel is that Cyrus, King of Ansan, is about to break the power of Babylon, to set free the captives of Israel, and give them permission to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem. Some of his hearers refuse to believe that their deliverer will be a heathen king, and not a descendant of the house of David. In reply (chap. xlv.) the prophet insists on the universality of Yahweh's reign. All the nations of the world are working out His purposes. Cyrus himself is simply accomplishing the designs of the Almighty. In this sense Cyrus is the anointed of Yahweh, "his Messiah."¹ But in these sections the prophet does not forget that the people whom he is addressing have long been accustomed to the idolatry of Babylonia. So nowhere, in the Bible or out of it, have we a sharper satire on idol worship in all its forms. The prophet pours upon it the full volume of his scorn and ridicule. Up to this

¹ Isa. xlv. 1.

time in Israel the struggle had continued between polytheism and the worship of Yahweh. But the lessons of the Exile, and the Return, and the teaching of him who was as "the voice of one that crieth,"¹ were not in vain. Henceforward Yahweh alone is God, and neither idol nor image is sanctioned in His worship.

Our prophet is best known to Christian readers as the exponent of the idea of a suffering Messiah. The passages which refer to the servant of Yahweh are interwoven in the texture of our Christian thought. However "the Servant-songs," as they are styled, will be most fitly considered when we are dealing with the growth of the Messianic idea.

Events in Babylon turned out as the prophet had predicted. It is quite possible that the facts that Cyrus had been aided by a conspiracy in Babylon, and that the Jews had openly welcomed him, caused him to consider his attitude to the conquered peoples who were settled in his new dominions. If they supported him when he invaded the country, they might equally be a source of danger to

¹ Isa. xl. 3.

him in the future. Accordingly we find him coming forward as the champion of the ancient religion of Babylon, and the protector of the rights of Merodach and Nebo. It has to be confessed that, in regard to his religious views, Cyrus did not fulfil the expectations of the Exilic prophet. The images of deities sent to Babylon by Nabonidus he restored to their former temples. There was no place for them in the city of Merodach. The exiles of different nations were also allowed to return home along with their gods. The Jews had no images of Yahweh, but they were permitted to take with them the sacred vessels of the Temple, towards the rebuilding of which Cyrus made them a grant from the royal treasury.¹

According to the book of Ezra the leaders of the first band of exiles were, on the homeward journey, Sheshbazzar, Prince of Judah, and Jeshua, the son of Jozadak, the priest. The number of those who joined in the expedition was 42,360, including probably representatives of the different tribes and families in Babylonia. With what hopes of

¹ Ezra iii, 7.

the future must the exiles have taken their last view of the city of Babylon! Gratitude and praise filled their hearts, and burst from their lips. For sheer bubbling gladness, is there anything in literature to equal Psalm cxxvi. ?—

When Yahweh turned again the captivity of Zion,
We were like unto them that dream.
Then was our mouth filled with laughter,
And our tongue with singing.
Then said they among the nations,
Yahweh hath done great things for them.
Yahweh hath done great things for us,
Whereof we are glad.

CHAPTER XV

AFTER THE RETURN

ONE would imagine that it should be an easy task to trace the history of the events immediately following "the decree of Cyrus," and the first return of the exiles from Babylonia. But, as a matter of fact, the history of this period positively bristles with difficulties. Let me mention some of them. Is Sheshbazzar to be identified with Zerubbabel? If not, who was the former? In the book of Ezra, iii. 8, the laying of the foundation of the Temple is ascribed to Zerubbabel, and in Ezra v. 16 to Sheshbazzar. On the other hand, it is hard to believe that Zerubbabel should be spoken of, as he is, in Ezra v. 2, and Sheshbazzar in Ezra v. 16, and not a hint given that the names stood for the same person. Again, when was the foundation of the Temple really laid—in the second year

of Cyrus, 537 B.C., or in the second year of Darius Hystaspis, 520 B.C.?

In the next place, was Darius of Ezra iv. 5, Darius Hystaspis (522—485 B.C.), or Darius Nothus (424—404 B.C.)? If the latter, then the date usually given for the rebuilding of the Temple is one hundred years too early. But are there any reasons for this supposition?

In Ezra iv. 4 we read: "Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building, and hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus, King of Persia, even unto the reign of Darius, King of Persia. And in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, wrote they an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem. And in the days of Artaxerxes wrote Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and the rest of his companions unto Artaxerxes, King of Persia."

I here append a list of the kings of Persia, which will explain the allusions in the above extract.

	B.C.
Cyrus	538—529
Cambyses	529—522

	B.C.
Pseudo-Smerdis	522
Darius Hystaspis	522—485
Xerxes (Ahasuerus)	485—464
Artaxerxes Longimanus	464—424
Darius Nothus	424—404

Now Ahasuerus in the book of Ezra is undoubtedly Xerxes; and Artaxerxes was his son. It would therefore appear that the historian meant to describe the period from Cyrus to Darius Nothus as one in which the Temple was left in ruins. On the other hand, it is impossible to suppose that he could imagine that Zerubbabel and Jeshua could be at the head of the community in the reign of Cyrus, and also, as is necessary on this supposition, one hundred years later, when they are stated to have set about rebuilding the Temple.¹

Let us now see how we can extricate ourselves from this historical maze. It must be a choice of probabilities. Some critics have indeed supposed that a Temple of some kind was built by Sheshbazzar, but soon destroyed, and that one hundred years later Zerubbabel built a new Temple in the reign of Darius Nothus. But the simplest and only satisfactory

¹ Ezra v. I.

method of solving our difficulty is to suppose that Ezra iv. 4-24 has somehow been misplaced, and ought to follow chapter vi. It would then refer to the building of the walls, which are indeed mentioned in it, and the references to the Persian kings would be correct.

As regards the question as to whether the foundations of the Temple were laid in the reign of Cyrus or of Darius Hystaspis, it seems reasonable to say that the foundation may have been laid in the former reign, but that practically nothing was done until the time of the prophet Haggai, in the reign of Darius. Further, it seems impossible to identify Sheshbazzar with Zerubbabel. The latter was the son of Shealtiel, and grandson of Jehoiachin, King of Judah. Some have thought that Sheshbazzar was a Persian, but it is more probable that he was a Jew; and if they are right who identify him with Shenazzar, the difficulty is entirely cleared away, for Shenazzar also was a son of Jehoiachin, and therefore the uncle of Zerubbabel.¹

Again, the authenticity of the so-called

¹ 1 Chron. iii. 18.

decree of Cyrus¹ has been much questioned, and in the most recent book² upon the subject, Dr. H. Preserved Smith rejects it altogether. He points out that Cyrus is made to say that Yahweh, God of Heaven, has given him all the kingdoms of the world. But in his own inscriptions he declares himself to be the obedient servant of Merodach, Bel, and Nebo. Dr. Smith also asserts that none of the kings of the East in his own edicts styles himself "King of Persia," but "King of Babylon, King of Armies," etc.

The latter point is not really of much importance, especially as in the Annalistic Tablet of Cyrus he is styled "King of Persia" under the date 546 B.C. But, before we are competent to treat of "the decree of Cyrus," we must understand something of the composition and date of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, which originally formed one book in the Jewish canon. Their basis is two sets of memoirs, that of Ezra and that of Nehemiah, written about the year 430 B.C.,

¹ Ezra i. 2.

² *Old Testament History*, International Theological Library, p. 345.

or more than one hundred years after the time of Cyrus. When these short pieces of autobiography were first formed into a book we cannot say, but it is absolutely certain that the final editor of Ezra-Nehemiah was the author of the book of Chronicles, and his work must be dated somewhere between the years 300 and 250 B.C., or roughly speaking, two hundred and fifty years after the decree of Cyrus. At this time the Persian empire had been overthrown by Alexander the Great, and the title "King of Persia" was probably in common use to distinguish the Persian rulers from the later Greek monarchs.

Let us now turn to the decree itself. We must distinguish between the fact of a decree, and the exact wording of it, as we have it in the book of Ezra. It is very unlikely that the author of the latter made any attempt to reproduce the decree in the exact words of the Persian king. It was almost impossible that it should be in existence after so great a lapse of time. So we have it in the form in which the chronicler would have written it had he been in Cyrus' place. The liberties that he took with it are evident from the fact that in

the book of Ezra it is given in two different forms, and in the latter there is no allusion to the "King of Persia," or to "Yahweh, God of Heaven."

But is it likely that there ever was such a decree? Certainly. Why should the Jews have experienced worse treatment at the hands of Cyrus than other nations? Everything indeed points to the opposite conclusion. But from the inscriptions of Cyrus we find that he did restore the various exiles to their homes, and caused all the gods whose images had been brought to Babylon to be returned to the places whence they had come. The Jews had no divine images, but Cyrus did what he could for them, and sent back to Jerusalem the sacred vessels which had been taken from the Temple. I therefore conclude that the fact underlying the so-called decree of Cyrus is historically true, but the language in which it is couched is the language of the chronicler.

The course of events was therefore somewhat as follows. In the reign of Cyrus the first detachment of Jews returned from Babylon. The great altar of burnt offering was re-erected in its old place in Jerusalem, and soon after-

wards a commencement was made in the work of restoring the Temple. It must be remembered that, although Jerusalem was in ruins, the country was not deserted. The descendants of those who had been left by Nebuchadnezzar to till the ground must have been fairly numerous, although poverty-stricken and apathetic. In the districts round Samaria was the foreign colony placed there by the Assyrians. To the north, in Galilee, were those who remained from the destruction of the northern kingdom. But for sixteen years little was done in Jerusalem. The returned exiles built houses for themselves amid its ruins, and dragged out a miserable existence, with scarcely heart enough to struggle against a period of prolonged famine and scarcity, and too dispirited to grapple with the great work of rebuilding the Temple. They excused themselves by saying, "The time is not come for Yahweh's House to be built."¹

The character of the message of Haggai in the year 520 B.C. makes this quite clear. "Be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith Yahweh, and be strong, O Jeshua, the son of Jozadak, the

¹ Hag. i. 2.

high priest ; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith Yahweh, and work. For I am with you, saith Yahweh of hosts, according to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt.”¹ Courage, faith, self-reliance, God-reliance—these were necessary if Israel was to fulfil her destiny.

In the following year Zechariah took up the work of encouragement. Tattenai, the Persian governor of the province, was favourable. At length, in the sixth year of Darius Hystaspis, 516 B.C., the Temple was completed, and its worship reorganised.

The series of visions by which Zechariah sought to kindle the enthusiasm of the people gives us a clear picture of his Messianic expectations. Adopting an expression used by the prophet Jeremiah, the Messiah is styled *Zemah*, or “the Branch.” Both Haggai and Zechariah believed that the time of His appearance was at hand. The Temple must be ready for Him when He comes. Then the kingdom of God shall be visibly inaugurated in Jerusalem, the holy city. In the seventh vision we have a graphic picture of its puri-

¹ Hag. ii. 4.

fication. You may destroy all criminals; God may remove the curse their sin has wrought; but unless you can remove sin itself, when temptation comes, it will break out again. So the prophet beholds an ephah, or seven-gallon cask, with a lid of lead; and, on its being opened, he sees within it a woman whose name is "Wickedness." The lid is again fastened down, and the cask taken up by two strong-winged females, who bear it off to the land of Shinar, where "Wickedness" is to dwell. There is something peculiarly suggestive in the idea of the Jews, themselves lately set free from Babylon, sending as an offering to their old oppressors a cask filled with the embodiment of Jewish wickedness. And yet it has been said that the Jews were without a sense of humour. At any rate, in the description of the purified city we have the germ of the idea, afterwards so clearly developed in apocalyptic literature, of the kingdom of God as opposed to the kingdoms of the world.

Zechariah's picture of the Messianic city was not realised. Even still, it is only an ideal. It shall need neither walls nor bulwarks.

The presence of God shall be sufficient protection for it.¹ Rather, it shall be a city of villages, nestling on the hill-sides and in the valleys, filled with men and women living beautiful and peaceful lives. Siege and warfare, which are especially cruel to children and to the old, shall be like a forgotten dream. The years of misery and suffering shall be ended. For "thus saith Yahweh of hosts: There shall yet old men and old women sit in the streets of Jerusalem, every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof."²

An interesting question now arises as to the subsequent history of Zerubbabel. At the most we can only conjecture from what we are told. As we have seen, Zerubbabel was of the Royal Family of Judah. Now in the book of Jeremiah, xxii. 24, we read: "As I live, saith Yahweh, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were the signet upon My right hand, yet would I pluck thee thence." But in the last verse of the prophecy of Haggai we read: "In that day,

¹ Zech. ii. 5.

² Zech. viii. 4.

saith Yahweh of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel. saith Yahweh, and will make thee as a signet : for I have chosen thee, saith Yahweh of hosts." May we not infer from this that Zerubbabel, in the opinion of the prophet, is to take the place of Coniah or Jehoiachin? Again, in the book of Zechariah, the high priest, Jeshua, is said to be a sign to Jerusalem that Yahweh is about to bring forth His servant "the Branch."¹ This is distinctly Messianic. Further, some of the exiles, having heard of the rebuilding of the Temple, sent certain of their number to Jerusalem with offerings to help on the work. Zechariah is directed to take some of the silver and gold which they have brought, and make a number of circlets to form a crown. By whom was it to be worn? The received text says, "by Jeshua, the high priest." This cannot be right. Jeshua was never supposed to be "the Branch" or Messiah. A later scribe, in the period of the priest-kings, must have written Jeshua for Zerubbabel, which is the name clearly required by the context. Carefully weighing all the

¹ Zech. iii. 8.

circumstances, the most reasonable conclusion seems to be that Zerubbabel, if not actually declared king, was so identified by the Jews with their Messianic expectations, that Darius had him put to death, or at any rate, removed from Jerusalem. This would account for the Jewish tradition that Zerubbabel died in Babylon.

Then for sixty years we have no records. Judæa was simply a province of the Persian empire, and governed by a Persian satrap. The people were poor, over-taxed, disappointed, and discontented. The bright hopes aroused by the prophet of the Return had had no fulfilment. The Temple had been rebuilt under the influence of Haggai and Zechariah, but where was the promise of the coming of the Messiah?

The book of Malachi, which is most probably to be assigned to the latter part of this period, gives us a picture of a people indifferent and rebellious. Yahweh has not been to them what they expected. Men said: "Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of Yahweh, and He^cdelighteth in them."¹ They asked: "Where is the God of judg-

¹ Mal. ii. 17.

ment?" They said: "It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept His charge?"¹ The heathen were faring better than the chosen people. Would it not be better to live like the heathen? And so indifference was killing religion. Animals, which they dared not present to the Persian satrap, were considered good enough to offer to Yahweh. Intermarriages with foreign women were slackening the bonds which united "the peculiar people." Their wives turned away their hearts. The priests, although they represented the moral and spiritual force in the community, were little better than the rest of the people. Their duties were only "a sad mechanic exercise," a weary iteration of a ritual that had become lifeless.

Ezra is said to have been a priest-scribe of the family of Zadok, and his genealogy from Aaron is given in full. His work in the establishment of Judaism was apparently most momentous, yet his history is beset with difficulties. In fact, these are so real that some modern critics, including Dr. H. Preserved Smith, regard Ezra not as an actual man at all,

¹ Mal. iii. 14.

but only as "an impersonation of tendencies." "During the century after Nehemiah the community in Judah was becoming more rigid in its exclusiveness and in its devotion to the ritual. Ezra was the ideal scribe projected upon the background of an earlier age."¹ This is really solving one set of difficulties by creating another. History requires some one who did very much what Ezra is reported to have done.

So far as we can gather from our records, in the year 458 B.C., Ezra gathered together a caravan of about eighteen hundred Jews, and set out from Babylon for Jerusalem. They had permission to do so from Artaxerxes. The language of the decree said to have been issued by the Persian king suggests many points for inquiry; but, as in the case of the similar document attributed to Cyrus, we may understand that the form, in which we have it, is that given to it by the chronicler. Why Artaxerxes should have been specially favourable to the Jews we are not told, but we may be certain that it was for some political reason.

The avowed object of Erza was to reform the ceremonial of the Temple. "For Ezra

¹ *Old Testament History*, p. 396.

had set his heart to seek the law of Yahweh, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments."¹ But on his arrival in Jerusalem he found things were by no means ripe for his proposed reforms. From his point of view there were graver errors which must first be combated. The Jews in Babylon had learned to value purity of race. It was lightly regarded in Jerusalem. Priests, Levites, and the people of Israel had largely intermarried with women of alien races. In earlier days this would have caused little comment. An infusion of new blood is often a benefit to a nation. But now Israel was not to be so much a nation as a Church—a people, separate from all others, to preserve the truth entrusted to it, until the fulness of time should come. Marriage with the heathen might involve a relapse into idolatry. Ezra is represented as horror-stricken at the state of affairs. He publicly humbled himself before Yahweh, and offered up a very striking prayer in the presence of the people, which had so great an effect that Shecaniah, on their behalf, made a proposition that they should at once

¹ Ezra vii. 10.

repudiate their foreign wives and children.¹ An assembly of the whole people was summoned to consider the question, and a commission of elders was appointed to investigate the matter. This commission was virtually a Divorce Court. It sat for three months, and at the conclusion of its labours all strange wives had been put away.

If the chronology of the chronicler be correct, an historical difficulty now meets us. Ezra had come to Jerusalem for the purpose of promulgating the law, 'and yet we hear nothing further of him for a period of thirteen years. It may be that the banishment of the wives of alien race was not so simple and unanimous a proceeding as the historian would have us believe. Indeed, on the face of it, it seems probable that much hostility was aroused by the action of Ezra, and that he was unable to proceed with his work, until supported by the authority of Nehemiah. The alternative to this view is to suppose that chapters viii. and ix. of the present book of Nehemiah have been transposed, and should in their main outline follow Ezra x.

¹ Ezra x, 2.

In the month of December, 445 B.C., we find Nehemiah at the court of Artaxerxes, and holding the position of cup-bearer to the King. It conveys an entirely false impression to translate this word "butler," as some writers do. It was a position of much importance, involving close intercourse with the sovereign, and the duty of protecting him against any attempt upon his life by poison. A company of men, amongst whom was Hanani, the brother of Nehemiah, had just returned from Jerusalem. The report which they brought was most discouraging. "The remnant that are left of the Captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach : the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire."¹ It is uncertain whether this refers to the destruction by Nebuchadnezzar, or whether partial repairs had been effected only to be overthrown by local enemies.

Four months elapsed before Nehemiah could obtain a favourable opportunity for a private interview with the King. But when this had been effected, Artaxerxes at once granted him

¹ Neh. i. 3.

permission to go to Jerusalem, gave him passports to the various governors through whose provinces he would pass, and also a letter to Asaph, keeper of the royal forests, to grant him timber for the gates of the citadel of the Temple, and of the walls of the city. Armed with royal authority, and himself a man of powerful personality, Nehemiah overcame all obstacles, and in fifty-two days the walls were completed. As Josephus says: "He was a man of a good and righteous disposition, and very ambitious to make his own nation happy; and he hath left the walls of Jerusalem as an eternal monument of himself." ¹

The walls having thus been finished, we read that Ezra immediately promulgated the law.¹ What was this law? We reply that it was the Pentateuch as we now possess it. The period of the Captivity in Babylon was one of considerable literary activity. Deprived of the religious services of the Temple at Jerusalem, and yet firmly believing that their restoration to their own land was only a question of time, the exilic priests began to codify the old usages of the Temple worship.

¹ *Antiquities*, xi. 5.

² Neh. viii. 1.

The first collection of such is probably that known to us as the "Law of Holiness," Lev. xvii.—xxvi. Ezekiel in the latter part of his book shows clear signs of acquaintance with this law. Other regulations were gradually drawn up or reduced to writing, until finally a complete code of priestly regulations came into existence. This code was afterwards embodied in a short historical narrative, written on a deliberate plan, and presenting clearly marked features of its own. It contains a large number of words used only by exilic and post-exilic writers; it repeats the same formulæ again and again; it is a systematic narrative with a complete system of chronology and genealogical tables. This work, called *P*, or the "Priests' Code," was subsequently combined with the prophetic narrative *JE*, which had previously been united with the work of the Deuteronomist. It was this completed Pentateuch that Ezra brought with him to Jerusalem.

"That the priestly laws existed in any one complete compilation before the time of the Exile, so that they could be referred to for literary purposes, as a code well known to

the people at large, is hardly any longer possible to be maintained ; but that the customs and institutions, with which these laws are concerned, had most of them existed for centuries, and were provided for by appropriate regulations, is not denied." ¹ In this connection it is worthy of note that we learn from Nehemiah viii. 13-18 that, until the people of Jerusalem received instruction from Ezra, they had been ignorant of the right way to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. Such ignorance would be incomprehensible if we had to believe that the complete code of priestly laws had previously been in existence, and formed part of the sacred writings of the Jewish people.

¹ Ryle, *Canon of Old Testament*, p. 71.

CHAPTER XVI

THE MESSIANIC IDEA

ON the way to the Mount of the Ascension the disciples asked the Master, "Lord, dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"¹ In so doing they gave utterance to the popular Messianic hope of a temporal kingdom, in which all the children of Israel were to be reunited under a king whose dwelling-place would be in Jerusalem. This kingdom would at first extend as widely as that of David, but would finally embrace the world. Jerusalem would thus become the metropolis of the earth.

Our Lord in a sense did not reply to the question of the Apostles, but He laid down the general principle:—"It is not for you to know times or seasons, which the Father hath set within His own authority." Times and seasons, the beginning and end of

¹ Acts i. 6.

dispensations, these are known to God alone. Further than this Christ could not take the disciples at the time. But although the idea of the Messianic kingdom was so prominent in Jewish thought, yet after the Ascension we find it exerting little influence in the Christian Church. We ask, Why was this? The answer is, that it was the result of the guidance of the Holy Ghost. Our Lord, on the occasion referred to, did not repeat to the Apostles the teaching so often given before the Crucifixion. It would come back to their minds one day in its fulness, for of the Comforter He had said: "He will bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you."¹ Amongst the things they would thus remember was the statement: "My kingdom is not of this world."² It was a new idea. Only after Pentecost did the Apostles understand it.

In the Christian Church, indeed, the Jewish expectation of a Messianic kingdom assumed a different form in the belief in the millennium, which was derived from a literal interpretation of Revelation xx. 4. This belief was common, but by no means universal, in the early Church.

¹ John xiv. 26.

² John xviii. 36.

It was strengthened by the study of Jewish apocalypses, which were a very popular form of literature at the time. Jerome speaks contemptuously of millenarian Christians as "our half-Jews who look for a Jerusalem of gold and precious stones from Heaven, and a future kingdom of a thousand years, in which all nations shall serve Israel." But although millenarian views have been from time to time revived in the Christian Church, yet we may fairly say that practically their final defeat was due to Augustine, who, in his *City of God*, identified the millennium with the history of Church on earth.¹

We must now endeavour to understand what was the basis of Jewish expectancy. The idea of an earthly Messianic kingdom was the principal topic of apocalyptic literature during the century and a half prior to the Incarnation. The so-called "Psalter of Solomon" was probably written in the period from 63—48 B.C. In it we read as follows:

Behold, O Lord, and raise up for them their King,
The Son of David, at the time which Thou, our God,
knowest,

¹ *De Civ. Dei*, xx, 7.

That Thy servant should reign over Israel.

And gird Him with power to beat down unrighteous rulers.

He shall judge the peoples and nations in the wisdom of His righteousness.

He shall have the peoples of the Gentiles to serve Him under His yoke,

And He shall glorify the Lord by the submission of all the earth,

And He shall cleanse Jerusalem with sanctification as from the beginning,

That Gentiles may come from the ends of the earth to see His glory.

In the "Similitudes" which occur in the book of Enoch, and which may be assigned to the earlier part of the first century B.C., we have another description of the coming of the "Chosen One," the Messiah, whom the author also styles the "Son of Man." He is to overthrow all worldly powers, and at His presence iniquity shall vanish like a shadow. The resurrection of the dead shall take place at His appearing; the righteous rising with their bodies to enjoy the kingdom of the Messiah, while the souls of the wicked are to be consigned to the place of punishment. Following the prophet Ezekiel, the author portrays the final battle between the powers

of the world and the Messianic King, in which the former are overthrown before Jerusalem.

In the most ancient of the miscellanies known as the "Sibylline Oracles," and which may probably date from the year 140 B.C., we have a graphic description of the glories of the reign of the Messiah. He will come at the close of a period of great distress, and establish His kingdom in Jerusalem. After the heathen have been finally overcome there shall be a period of universal peace. By land and sea the nations of the world shall flock to the holy city to pay their vows. Then "God shall dwell with them, and be their everlasting light." The signs of the coming of the Messiah shall be evident beforehand. Flaming swords shall be seen in the sky. The light of the sun shall fail at mid-day, and the moon's rays fall upon the earth at unusual times. Blood shall flow from rocks, and warriors and huntsmen appear in the clouds of heaven.

Such, very briefly, was the character of popular Messianic expectation in the time of our Lord. We must now go back to the

prophets, and endeavour to trace the growth of this idea.

We may take the prophecies of Amos and Hosea together, because their views as to the future are very similar. Judgment is about to fall on Israel because of sin. This will involve the destruction of the great mass of the people. A remnant, however, shall survive who will be faithful to Yahweh. They will form the nucleus of a new kingdom. The time will come when the new Israel "shall blossom as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon."¹ Here we have the germ of the idea of a Messianic kingdom, but the King is not mentioned. In neither of these prophets is there any allusion to the Messiah.

In the book of Micah, which contains similar threats of doom, we have the first hint of a Messianic deliverer. The social sins of the people are so terrible, that, as the Canaanites were driven out before them, even so shall they be driven out. Because of their uncleanness they shall be destroyed, even with a grievous destruction.² But beyond this time of tribulation and dispersion the prophet sees

¹ Hos. xiv. 5.

² Mic. ii. 10.

the dawn of an era of peace and restoration. A new king of Davidic race shall, under Yahweh, be the ruler of the nation. "But thou, Beth-lehem Ephratah, which art little to be among the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall One come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting. And He shall stand, and shall feed His flock in the strength of Yahweh, in the majesty of the name of Yahweh, His God; and they shall abide, for now shall He be great unto the ends of the earth. And this Man shall be peace."¹

It must not be overlooked that in a sense every king of Israel was a Messiah, the anointed of Yahweh. Thus when Samuel was sent to Bethlehem to anoint one of the sons of Jesse to be king, and when his eyes fell upon Eliab, he is reported to have said: "Surely Yahweh's Messiah is before him."² Hence the ideal King, who would rule over the restored and purified Israel, was naturally styled the "Messiah."

It is in the prophecy of Isaiah that we find the fullest and grandest description of this

¹ Mic. v. 2.

² 1 Sam. xvi. 6.

Messianic King—"the King of the Four Names," as he has been called :

The people who walked in darkness behold a great light ;
Those who dwell in the land of the deepest gloom, upon
them a light brightly shines.

Thou multipliest the nation, Thou increasest joy ;
They joy before Thee as men joy in harvest, and as men
exult when they divide the spoil.

For Israel's burdensome yoke, and the crossbar laid on
his shoulder,

The rod of his taskmaster, thou hast broken as in
Midian's day of battle.

For every boot of the warrior whose tread resounds, and
every war-cloak drenched with blood,

Will be burned up, will be the prey of the flames.

For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given,

And dominion rests on His shoulder,

And His name will be Counsellor of Wonders,

Mighty Divinity, Father of Spoil, Prince of Peace.

Increased will be dominion, and to peace there will be
no end

Upon the throne of David, and throughout his kingdom,
To establish and to support it by justice and by righteous-
ness

From henceforth and for ever. The zeal of Yahweh will
perform this.¹

Here we have the basis of the popular expectation of a later day—a wonderful and world-wide earthly kingdom, and a wonderful King

¹ Isa. ix. 2.

reigning in the power of Yahweh. Subsequent prophets and apocalyptic writers added additional details, but the general idea of the Messianic kingdom had its origin in the passages quoted above.

One of the most pathetic things in history is to watch the mistakes of the Jews in regard to the Messiah. At one time they are ready to acclaim Zerubbabel; at another, having rejected the Christ, they follow Barcochab to their own destruction.

But it may be urged, You have not dealt at all with some of the best known Messianic predictions in the Old Testament; what about Isaiah lii. 13—liii.? The answer is that this passage was not generally recognised as Messianic by the Jews. Their minds were so occupied by dreams of universal sovereignty that they would not believe that the Messiah could possibly be "despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief."¹ Thus Mr. Montefiore explains the Servant of Yahweh as the ideal Israel. "The Servant in this sense is a conception arrived at by selecting all the noblest traits in the best

¹ Isa. liii. 3.

spirits of Israel's past history, and in some of the prophet's own contemporaries, and uniting them together in a typical and highly idealised personification. The actual Israel is the opposite of the ideal Israel. Yet through the ministry of the Servant the ideal and actual Israel will ultimately become one. The actual Israel is blind to God's work, and deaf to God's word, while the function of the ideal Israel is to spread abroad the knowledge of God. . . . Indeed, the prophet is perfectly conscious of the seeming absurdity of his prediction. Israel is now despised by all, abject and abhorred. Those who are the truest Israelites, who come nearest to the ideal, are despised the most,—despised and ill-treated. It is likely enough that any fitful Babylonian persecution fell most heavily upon the patriotic section of the Israelite exiles. Oppression, forced labour, imprisonment, and even death may occasionally have been their lot. But these faithful ones would not only be specially subject to the insults of the foreigner, but also to the disregard and contempt of many of their own people. After the final victory of Babylon, Gentile and Jew will alike

recognise their error. The latter will perceive that it has been the neglected few who, through their fidelity to Yahweh, have made the national redemption a moral possibility. . . . Finally, after the deliverance has been effected, and the exiles have settled in their own land, Israel and the Servant became one and the same.”¹

On the other hand, the Christian Church has always interpreted this passage of Christ. It has followed Philip in his exposition to the Treasurer of Queen Candace. The Evangelists also always represent our Lord as the complete fulfilment of prophecy. In what sense are we to understand this? Perhaps the consideration of a shorter, but most important, passage may assist us in our subsequent study of the description of the Servant of Yahweh.

St. Matthew declares that the birth of Jesus was the fulfilment of the prophecy :

Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
And shall call his name Immanuel.²

We have already seen that this statement

¹ *Hibbert Lectures*, pp. 275-81.

² Isa. vii. 14.

had a direct reference to the political situation at the time. Pekah, King of Northern Israel, and Rezin, King of Damascus, had formed an alliance to oppose Assyria. When Ahaz of Judah refused to join with them, these two kings prepared to invade his territory. Ahaz, in despair, appealed to Assyria for help. Isaiah protested in vain. He implored Ahaz not to take a step which would be irrevocable. He also gave the king a sign. A child would shortly be born, who would be called Immanuel, "God with us." But before the boy would be old enough to know the difference between good and evil, Syria and Northern Israel would be conquered and depopulated.

We must endeavour to understand what was the really important point in this incident. The prophet trusts in God. Ahaz does not. Isaiah has got hold of the idea, "God is with us." The king cannot realise it. "God with us!"—on that the whole conversation turns. Isaiah, at the time, was not thinking of the Messiah, but he had learned that "God is with men." Of that great idea the Incarnation is the complete fulfilment.

We turn again to the Servant of Yahweh, as portrayed in Isaiah liii. To understand the description we must consider briefly the various passages in which the term "servant" is used. There are some where there can be no doubt as to the meaning of the word. Such for example is the following: "But thou, Israel, My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend: thou whom I have taken hold of from the ends of the earth, and called thee from the corners thereof, and said unto thee, thou art My servant, I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away."¹ Or again: "Yet now hear, O Jacob My servant, and Israel whom I have chosen; Thus saith Yahweh that made thee, and formed thee from the womb, who will help thee: Fear not, O Jacob My servant, and thou, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen."² Here the servant is plainly the nation of Israel, descended from Abraham, the friend of God.

It would seem, however, that the prophet soon began to assign a more restricted meaning to the term. The Servant cannot be the whole nation, for He is to redeem Israel; He is to

¹ Isa. xli, 8.

² Isa. xliv. 1.

open blind eyes, to bring prisoners out of the dungeon, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.¹

We now come to four passages which deal with the person and work of this Servant of Yahweh. They are known as the "Servant Songs," as they are in metrical form, and therefore to be distinguished from the prose context. The first is as follows :

Behold, My Servant whom I uphold,
My chosen, in whom My soul delights,
I have put My spirit upon Him,
He will set forth the law to the nations.

He will not cry aloud nor roar as a lion,
Nor cause His voice to be heard in the street,
A cracked reed He will not break,
And a dimly burning wick He will not quench.

Faithfully will He set forth the law ;
He will not burn dimly nor be crushed in spirit,
Till He have set the law in the earth,
And for His instruction the far countries wait.²

Here the Servant is the missionary of Yahweh—a missionary who will bring the knowledge of the "law of God" to all nations. From the context we may imagine that there

¹ Isa. xlii. 7.

² Isa. xlii. 1-4.

is possibly here an allusion to Cyrus, the ideal king.

In the second song it is the Servant Himself who speaks :—

Hearken ye far countries to Me, and listen ye distant peoples,
Yahweh has called Me from the womb, from My mother's lap has He celebrated My name ;
He made My mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of His hand He hid Me ;
He made Me a polished shaft, in His quiver He stored Me.

He said to Me: Thou art My Servant, in whom I will glorify Myself,
And I was honoured in the eyes of Yahweh, and My God became My strength ;
And as for Me, I said, I have laboured in vain ; to no purpose, and for nothing have I spent my strength ;
Nevertheless My right is with Yahweh, and My recompense with My God.

And now Yahweh says—He who formed Me from the womb to be a servant to Him,
That I might bring Jacob back to Him, that Israel might be gathered :
It is too light a thing to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel ;
So I set Thee as a light of the nations, that My deliverance may be to the end of the earth.¹

¹ Isa. xlix. 1-6.

Here the Servant is prophet rather than king, and here we have also the first hint of failure. His preparation for His mission was long, and then He was given a word to speak,—a message sharp as a sword, and piercing as an arrow from the quiver of God. But, as He looks back upon His work, He can see only failure, and strength spent to no purpose. Yet He has done His duty, and His reward is with His God. The day also is coming when God's salvation shall embrace, not Israel only, but all the ends of the earth.

The Servant speaks again in the third song :

The Lord Yahweh has given Me the eloquence of His
disciples,
That I may know how to revive the weary one with
words of comfort,
In the morning He wakens mine ear that I may hearken
as His disciple,
And I have not been rebellious ; I have not turned
back.
My back I gave to the smiters, and My cheeks to those
who plucked out the beard,
My face I did not hide from insult and spitting.
But the Lord Yahweh will help Me, therefore am I not
confounded ;
Therefore I hardened My face like flint, and was sure
that I should not be ashamed.

Near is He who redresses My wrongs; who will contend with Me? Let us stand forth together!

Who is My opponent? Let him draw near to Me!

Behold the Lord Yahweh will help Me; who is he that can worst Me?

Behold, they will all fall to pieces like a garment; the moths will eat them.¹

Here the Servant is not merely a prophet, but a martyr-prophet. The opposition to his message has strengthened. His own sufferings are given in detail. Yet his Redeemer is near,—in this hope he will stand firm. The whole of this song suggests the life and work of Jeremiah.

Finally, we have the great passage (Isa. lii. 13—liii.) descriptive of the suffering Servant, which forms the climax of these songs. Here the Servant is victim as well as priest. The descriptions of the Servant have been becoming gradually more personal. This is entirely so. Men may say that the servant spoken of is "the personification of the ideal Israel," or "the genius of Israel," but such an explanation appears to me inadequate. No doubt the prophet has learned the lessons of the Exile,—

¹ Isa. l. 4-9.

the lessons of suffering. He has realised that all that is best and highest in human life comes through suffering, or involves pain. The gold must be purified in the fire. He has seen the innocent involved in the same penalty as the wicked, the devoted servant of Yahweh carried into the same exile as the scoffer and the idolater, the godly few bearing the sins of the many. He has seen all this. Possibly he saw no farther. But read the poem, and ask yourself:--Where in history shall I look for its fulfilment, where behold the' vicarious Sufferer, "the despised and rejected of men?" Who is He who was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities, and to whom there has been now assigned a portion with the great? And you must answer, Jesus of Nazareth.

We can therefore see in what sense Christ was the fulfilment of prophecy. To each prophet there was revealed something of the perfect life, and of the relationship of God to men. Each learned something as the Spirit of God spake with his spirit. Gather all these hints together; picture One who is King and Prophet, Priest and Victim; One who in very

truth is Immanuel ; and then you will say :—
The life of Jesus Christ makes all plain.
The old-world prophet may not indeed have
realised it, but he was foreshadowing the
Perfect Life.

CHAPTER XVII

THE DOCTRINE OF A FUTURE LIFE

IT is difficult for the ordinary Christian to avoid reading Christian beliefs into the statements in the Old Testament in regard to the future life. He also finds it difficult to harmonise the various views which are expressed therein by different writers. For example, the Psalter is a most confusing book in this respect to the intelligent, but unlearned, reader. All the opinions held at different times as regards the future of the individual are to be found in these hymns of the Jewish Church. But we are apt to read them as if all the beliefs expressed there had equal authority, and are therefore puzzled when one psalmist represents the dead as not remembered by Yahweh,¹ and as cut off from His hand; while another is equally certain that

¹ Ps. lxxxviii. 5.

Yahweh is present not only in Heaven, but also in Sheol.¹

It is therefore evident that in order to understand the subject we must consider it from an historical standpoint, and see how the views originally held by the Semitic race, and therefore by the children of Israel, were in the case of the latter gradually changed and purified. The date at which the various books of the Old Testament were written is therefore a matter of much importance. Having decided the chronological order of the books in accordance with general principles of biblical criticism, we are enabled to give an historical sketch of the growth of eschatological ideas. On the other hand, when this has been done, then the opinions expressed in any particular passage may help us to decide the date of its composition, if on other grounds this has been left in doubt.

Now the Jewish system of religion was not a thing complete and finished from the moment of its birth. God revealed Himself "By divers portions and in divers manners."² The great object of revelation was to give men right

¹ Ps. cxxxix. 8.

² Heb. i. 1,

thoughts about God; but, until they thought rightly about God, they could not think rightly about a future life. When the tribes accepted Yahweh as their national deity, he was to them, primarily, their leader and their war-God. He had brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, and He would go before them against their foes. Their rules of life were to be found in the "Ten Words," but the religion of Yahweh had originally no special doctrine of a future life.

So at first, in regard to the dead, the children of Israel clung to the old beliefs which they held in common with the rest of the Semitic race. These beliefs are summed up under the name "ancestor-worship." The dead, they believed, had not really passed out of existence, but were living in a place called "Sheol." Originally used to represent the collective graves of a clan or family, this word, apparently even in pre-biblical times, had come to signify also the underworld, where all the dead were dwelling. No doubt the burial of bodies underground gave rise to the idea that the abode of the dead was also underground. This belief was practically

universal. It was held by primitive tribes in North America; in Africa, notably by the Zulus; by Aryan peoples; by the Babylonians; and by the Hebrews. Existence in Sheol was shadowy and undesirable. The Yoruba proverb runs, "A corner in this world is better than a corner in the world of spirits." With this we may compare the speech of Achilles in the *Odyssey*: "Nay! speak not to me comfortably of death, O great Odysseus. Rather would I live on the earth as the hireling of another, with a landless man who had no great livelihood, than bear sway among all the dead."¹ Similarly, in the literature of Babylon, Sheol is "the place, full of dust and gloom, where the shades flutter about like birds, leading a dull and joyless existence; doors and bars are covered with dust, and everything in which the heart of man had rejoiced has become dust and mould."² The infertile, waterless sand of the desert is doubtless the origin of this terrible idea of dust—dust everywhere in the underworld. It is no wonder that long life was the blessing mainly desired by men.

¹ *Od.*, xi, 486. ² Delitzsch, *Babel and Bibel*, p. 57.

According to the earliest view, the souls of the departed in Sheol took an interest in the lives of their descendants. They knew not only what was happening on earth, but what was about to happen. They could be consulted by the living, and belief in necromancy was universal. It is worthy of note that when the witch of Endor called up the soul of Samuel, he is styled Elohim or "god." In fact, the souls of the dead formed one class of the Elohim, or spiritual existences, by which the Semite believed his life to be influenced.

We have already seen that Teraphim, or images of the dead, were to be found in every house or tent. Sacrifices were offered to them; but the privilege of so doing was limited to a son of the departed.¹

Further, in this primitive conception of the unseen world, moral distinctions found no place. Good and bad were gathered together. It was the resting-place for the departed of all nations. It was "the house appointed for all living."² Worshippers of Merodach and Sin, of Rā and Isis, of Chemosh and Molech, all dwelt in a common underworld. On the

¹ See Charles, *Eschatology*, p. 25.

² Job xxx, 23.

other hand, in the epic of Gilgames, which also contains the Babylonian story of the Flood, we have a somewhat full description of the underworld, and in it we read of certain persons who had the privilege of resting on couches and drinking pure water. But this scarcely seems to imply moral distinctions in Sheol. Apparently, a mistake in the matter of burial, or a shameful death, or the hostility of a man's god, were sufficient to deprive the soul of these benefits. A small clay cone has recently been discovered, which originally had evidently been placed in a coffin, and the inscription on it asks that whosoever may find the coffin may leave it in its place and do it no injury, and concludes with these words of blessing for whosoever should thus act. "May his name continue to be blessed in the world above ; in the world below may his departed spirit drink clear water." What a boon ! Pure water in the place where dust lies thick on everything. Here we have the first hint of the later popular conception of paradise and hell.

This underworld was, originally, for the Israelite outside the jurisdiction of Yahweh.

In this the Israelite was on a similar plane to the members of other Semitic families. Sheol was equally outside the authority of Chemosh or Molech. The gods of living men did not exercise sway over the dead. So the psalmist gave utterance to a belief that no one would have dreamed of controverting, when he said,—

The dead praise not Yahweh
Neither any that go down into silence.¹

It is, however, clear that the idea of a righteous God was bound to revolutionise the primitive view of Sheol. The belief in the righteousness of Yahweh, which His worshippers should strive to imitate, was incompatible with that of a non-moral Sheol.

At first Yahwism did not attempt to reform the older views. But when the prophetic narrative of creation, as found in Genesis ii. 4—iii., had been generally received, new ideas as regards the future became prevalent.² We read: “Yahweh Elohim formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became

¹ Ps. cxv. 17.

² Charles, *Eschatology*, p. 41.

a living soul.”¹ But this “breath of life,” or “spirit of life,” was also possessed by the lower animals. It was when Yahweh sent forth His spirit that they were created. If then the soul of man was living only when “the spirit of life,”² was present, it followed that, when it was withdrawn, man ceased to exist, and became “a dead soul.”³ This destruction of personality is plainly stated in the book of Ecclesiastes, where the dust is said “to return to the earth as it was, and the spirit to return to God who gave it.”⁴ Thus Yahweh “gathers in” to Himself again “the breath of life.” This view was the parent of Sadduceeism, of which St. Luke tells us that it believed “neither in resurrection, angel, nor spirit.”⁵ It finds expression in many of the Psalms, and is very clearly stated in the book of Job :

For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will
sprout again,

And that the tender branch thereof will not cease

But . . . man giveth up the ghost,—and where is he?⁶

Hopeless as this view of the future was, it

¹ Gen. ii. 7.

² Ps. civ. 30.

³ Num. vi. 6.

⁴ Eccles. xii. 7.

⁵ Acts xxiii. 8.

⁶ Job xiv, 7, 19.

helped to destroy ancestor-worship, with its superstitions and impossibilities. It paved the way for better things. The mistake of the Sadducees lay in this—that they mistook the transitional for the permanent.

But other influences began to modify men's thoughts in regard to the future. With the development of prophetic teaching, new and enlarged ideas as to the extent of the jurisdiction of Yahweh became common. According to Amos, Yahweh not only brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, but He also brought the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Syrians from Kir. For the first time Yahweh appears as the almighty ruler of the nations of the world.

But old beliefs die hard. A large proportion of the people still believed in the Sheol of their fathers. Others regarded death as practically the end of conscious existence. Yet it is quite evident that the new ideas about God must in time inevitably revolutionise men's thoughts as to the future life. If Yahweh is the Creator of heaven and earth, and the ruler of all the nations of men, Sheol will soon come to be considered as under His

authority. We see the first beginnings of this belief in the history of the book of Kings, where Yahweh restores the dead to life by the agency of His prophets. The power of Yahweh can at any rate reach the dead. When this lesson had been learned, and its consequences fully developed, we find a psalmist writing,—

Whither shall I go from Thy spirit ?
 Or whither shall I flee from Thy presence ?
 If I ascend unto Heaven Thou art there ;
 If I make my bed in Sheol, behold ! Thou art there.¹

Thus, some of the more spiritual among the Israelites were at this time in possession of two ideas which are essential to right thoughts about the future life :

1. Yahweh is God of heaven, and of earth, and of the places of the dead.
2. Yahweh is the absolutely righteous Being.

So far I have spoken only of the individual. But we must remember that one of "the ruling ideas of the early ages" was the paramount importance of the clan or nation. In fact, the nation, family, or clan was the unit, and not

¹ Ps. cxxxix. 7-8.

the individual. We see this idea finding expression in the common description of a death. "He was gathered to his fathers." The clan also existed in Sheol. From this beginning we have subsequently developed in the Old Testament a system of national eschatology. The clan of Jacob grew into the nation of Israel, with Yahweh as their God, and a definite religious and national ideal. As a nation they passed through one troublous period after another, until in the eighth century B.C. we find "the day of Yahweh" put forward as the solution of their questionings and the termination of their misfortunes. But, as we have seen, popular expectation and prophetic teaching differed as to the character of that day. Both believed that it would be a day of judgment; but on whom? The people answered, "On our enemies." "On yourselves for your iniquities," was the reply of the prophets. But both agreed that the day of Yahweh would usher in a period of happiness and peace.

From the seventh century B.C. this expectation was connected with the hope of the Messianic King. After the Messiah has assumed the

throne, the righteous remnant of Israel will dwell in a purified Palestine. But the blessings of the Messianic kingdom will not be limited to Israel. All nations will receive the offer of sharing in its bliss, and only the finally impenitent and rebellious will be destroyed.

But while this national eschatology was thus developing, a change came over men's views in regard to the individual. So long as each nation had its own deity, the latter and his worshippers formed the unit of value. But the exaltation, in Jewish thought, of Yahweh as supreme God of all nations tended to bring all mankind into touch with God, and to emphasise the importance of the individual soul. Of this new view Jeremiah is the apostle in the Old Testament. God will make a new covenant with the individual, not with the nation. God will write His laws in each man's heart. The prophet felt that God had done it in his own case. What He had done for him, He would do for all. "Thus in face of the coming exile, when the nation would cease to exist, and only individuals remain, Jeremiah was the first to conceive religion as the communion of the individual

soul with God.”¹ But this inevitably led to the law of individual retribution. The moral government of God was thus extended to the unseen world.

Thus we have two streams of thought :

1. The idea of a Messianic kingdom, ushering in a period of righteousness and bliss, after the judgment of the day of Yahweh.

2. The belief that the character of a man's future life will depend upon his conduct in the earthly stage of existence.

These two views found their point of union in the doctrine of the Resurrection. The righteous dead of Israel shall rise to share in the glories of the Messianic kingdom, while the wicked who reject Yahweh will be cast into Gehenna.

In the Old Testament there are two passages of especial interest which deal with this doctrine of the Resurrection. The first is Isaiah xxvi. 19. The date of the composition of the apocalyptic prophecy contained in this chapter is uncertain. Modern critics, as a rule, consider it post-exilic, but while Driver

¹ Charles, *Eschatology*, p. 61.

places it early in that period, Duhm assigns it to the close of the second century B.C. The verse in question is thus translated by Cheyne :

Thy dead shall arise ; the inhabitants of the dust shall awake, and shout for joy :

For a dew of lights is thy dew, and to life shall the earth bring the shades.¹

This is a very lofty and beautiful conception. Sheol, the land of dust and shadows, shall no longer hold the souls of the righteous. The wicked shall abide in it for ever, but for the godly it is only the intermediate state, while they await the advent of the Messiah. The real source of their life is their union with God.

The other passage referred to is found in the book of Daniel, xii. 2 : " And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." This is a very different doctrine. It may be accounted for by the late date of the book of Daniel, which was probably written about the year 165 B.C. The resurrection in this passage

¹ Isa. xxvi. 19.

is not limited to the righteous. At first sight it would seem that the best and the worst were to rise from the dead. But perhaps we shall best explain it by referring it to all Israel, as distinct from other nations. Sheol is still for the writer the godless land of dust, but Yahweh has power to summon the souls out of it. Accordingly He brings them back to earth, in order that they may stand before His judgment seat.

Does not the consideration of these old-world views as to the doctrine of a future life add force to the statement of St. Paul, that it was " Jesus Christ, who abolished death, and brought life and incorruption to light through the Gospel " ?¹

¹ II Tim. i. 10.

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